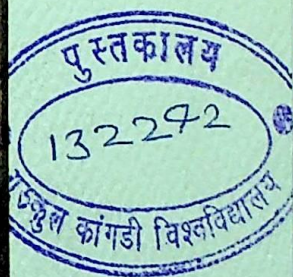
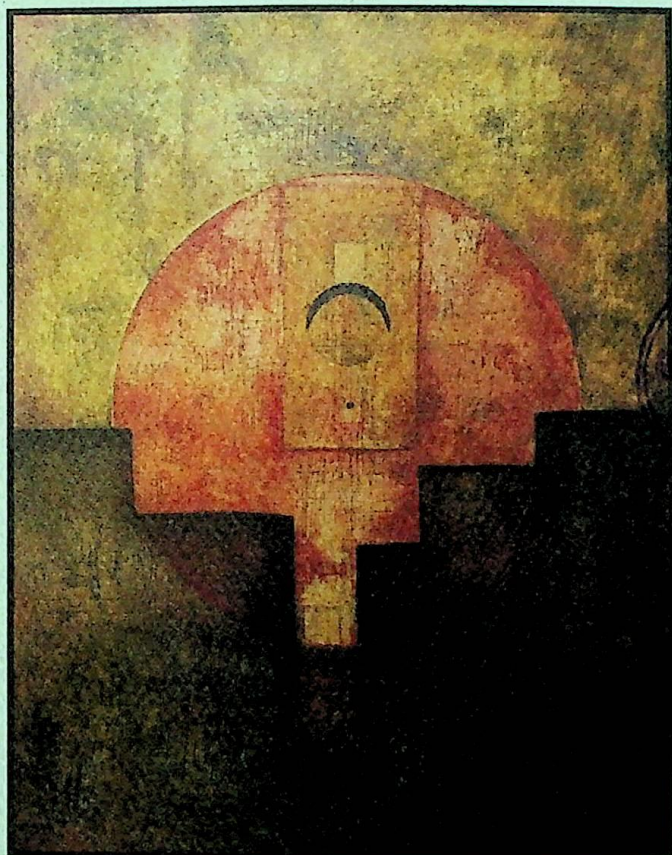




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White-Collar Masochism: Grove Press and the Death of the Managerial Subject

Jordan S. Carroll

Between its founding in 1951 and its labor crisis in 1970, Grove Press stood at the epicenter of radical politics and culture in the United States.¹ A major translator of late modernism and the avant-garde, Grove introduced US audiences to the theater of the absurd and the *nouveau roman*, publishing authors as important and far ranging as Samuel Beckett and Jorge Luis Borges. During the same period, the press served as a vehicle for revolutionary thought, publishing Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Fidel Castro, and Ho Chi Minh. Meanwhile, Grove made its mark on domestic policy, championing freedom of expression in a series of obscenity court cases defending its publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1959), Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1961), and William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1962). As a result of Grove's success in court, it became a premiere publishing house of philosophical and not-so-philosophical pornography, coming out with landmark editions of the Marquis de Sade. Under editor and owner Barnet ("Barney") Rosset, Grove constituted a nexus of aesthetic experimentation, left-wing politics, and literary erotica, a configuration unthinkable in mainstream publishing today.

Although like most publishers Grove did not track its readers, it did carry out a readership survey for the press's house magazine, *Evergreen Review* (Glass 2013, 130–31). The magazine and press shared editorial staff—Rosset topped *Evergreen's* masthead—and it featured excerpts or selections from virtually all major Grove authors. As Rosset states, he “wanted to tie *Evergreen Review* to Grove Press as much as possible” (2016, 101), and thus the editorial discourse in *Evergreen Review* illuminates how the press saw itself. Drawing on its survey undertaken by Marketing Data Inc., the press described the average subscriber in 1966

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as “a 39-year-old male, married, two children, a college graduate who holds a managerial position in business or industry, and has a median family income of \$12,875” (*Evergreen* 1966), more than \$95,000 in 2016 dollars. An astounding 90 percent of *Evergreen*’s subscribers were men (Glass 2013, 131), and while the survey does not state it outright, their high salaries and supervisory roles also suggest that Grove’s readership was predominately white. Surprisingly, the survey revealed the average Grove reader as a member of the professional-managerial class, “‘sold out’ types” (*Evergreen* 1966) who hardly fit the image of the austere militant or hedonistic youth projected by the magazine’s contents.² Although the press undoubtedly published for readers from many different backgrounds, it thus described its audience as the very class it so vehemently opposed (Schryer 2015, 3).

Rosset himself embodied this tension. The editor was radicalized at a wealthy private school, Parker High School, where he and several classmates produced a newspaper titled *Sommunist* (a portmanteau of Socialist-Communist) and, later, the *Anti-Everything* (Rosset 2016, 28–30). Rosset entered into the book business with the help of his father, a midwestern banker, and, when his father died, he merged his father’s bank with the press in order to pay for the court battles over *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (154–55). This combination of affluence and radicalism would come under fire during feminist and worker protests at the press in later years (more on this later), when, throwing Rosset’s wealth back in his face, the activists’ list of demands included, “No more mansions on Long Island for boss-man Rosset and his executive yes-men flunkies” (quoted in Gontarski 2001, xxvii).³ Nevertheless, Rosset seemed to believe he could inhabit the position of moneyed revolutionary, claiming that “most progressive, left-wing enterprises have come out of small-business entrepreneurship” (1990a, 31). “Small-time capitalists” like himself can get away with promoting avant-garde or even anticapitalist causes because they have certain “advantages,” including “a certain flexibility” that comes with financial security (1990b, 58). According to Rosset, Grove Press and other risk-taking publishers depend on “middle-class people with money to lose” (1990a, 56).

When Grove profiled its audience in the *Evergreen Review*, it was in a sense examining itself. This is very much in keeping with the overall editorial strategy of the press. As Grove editor Gilbert Sorrentino suggested, “Grove flourished because it considered the tastes and prejudices

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and opinions of—NOT some amorphous audience whose desires had to be satisfied—its editors. And above all, Barney's tastes and opinions" (1990, 105). In other words, Rosset *was* the press's target audience, so that, as he personified the publishing enterprise, his conflicts and paradoxes were its own. As a result, we can understand Grove's self-reflexive discourse, along with its publications, as a way of attempting to work through the contradictions of what it meant to be a white-collar radical.

A key way it did this was by presenting the Grove audience with a fantasy of masochistic selflessness. Masochism, or what Leo Bersani terms "self-shattering" (2010, 25), allowed Grove's white-collar radical to seem to divest himself of middle-class egoism and imaginatively sacrifice his own power. Providing an ideal instance of "abjection-supremacist" thought, which maintains, as Janet Halley suggests, that masochism totally undermines power by gesturing to "a state of being in which the self/other structure of social life is suspended and the political will to dominate rendered inarticulate and helpless" (2006, 161), Bersani's formulation proves particularly apt in describing Grove. By undercutting mastery over the body, this form of political masochism appears to destabilize mastery over the world, and thus erotic depersonalization seems to offer a way for Grove's affluent, white, male persona to leave behind class and identity categories, throwing off the stigma of its privilege. Moments of sublime and obscene abnegation in Grove literature in this way serve to suspend the problem of the professional-managerial radicals' particular interests and perspective, enabling them to say, along with Beckett's ravaged and disintegrating figures, "What matter who's speaking" (Beckett 1967, 85). The midcentury middle class often presented itself as classless and universal by promoting doctrines of the human and the individual but, through Grove, it succeeded in the same project by renouncing those very terms.

Grove's attempt to resolve its class contradictions would have larger implications for literary culture. Important in this regard, it published major works in the literary and artistic movement Susan Sontag called the "new sensibility," which rejected the notion of "individual personal expression," favoring instead "the impersonal" and "transpersonal" (1966, 297).⁴ In effect an aesthetic of antihumanism, this new sensibility militated against the agency and coherence of individuals by promoting sensations and experiences that exceeded the limits of conscious control or rational thought, including interpretive criticism (Greif 2015, 279).⁵

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Even before the advent of poststructuralism, Grove published many of the primary texts featured in antihumanist critique, works that, rejecting the sovereignty of the ego, welcomed the ecstasy of self-dissolution. The press did not always espouse the philosophy it enacted—Grove was not a main translator for French theory as such. But Grove did function as a mediator between one set of literary values and another, dismantling the old humanist consensus while introducing the canon of antihumanism even before these developments could be explicitly formulated in American literary criticism.⁶

In heralding the eclipse of the individual, Grove was drawn to the most minor and denigrated of genres—pornography. This was in part because obscenity constituted the fracture point between humanism and antihumanism, its depictions of objectified, fragmented, or otherwise compromised selves dramatizing both the terror and the allure of erotic nonsovereignty. More often than not, though, it was the workaday life of the managerial subject that returned in this erotic literature, albeit in refracted forms. Many of the greatest scenes of transgression in Grove, that is, hinge on a breakdown of educational training or managerial discipline, as if the naughtiest thing a white-collar worker could countenance was professional failure, a crisis in the production and reproduction of human capital. In these narratives, the death of the subject appears so scandalous and so enticing because it represents a squandering of personnel or future earning potential, *épater le bourgeois* as a human resources nightmare.⁷

Grove's publications represented a break with midcentury literary culture. After the de-Marxification of the intellectual and artistic scene in the United States, many turned to individualism as a central critical value, displacing the struggle against capitalism into an artistic struggle against quantitative abstraction and mass man (Guilbaut 1983, 34–38). This displacement allowed thinkers to chart a way between the capitalist organization man and the communist true believer, maintaining a private and uncommitted skepticism that *The Partisan Review* termed “critical nonconformism” (“Our” 1996, 118). Although this narrative is best recognized in the New York Intellectuals, who championed the autonomy of art against a homogeneous and all-consuming mass culture, we can see parallels in other critical schools: Americanists called for Emersonian self-reliance, press-ganging the newly canonized American Renaissance into the fight against totalitarianism (Pease 1985, 127), while New Critics attended to the qualitative particularity of the literary object, shielding

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it from the instrumental rationality of northern industrial capitalism (Jancovich 1993, 37). For Cold War critics, literature helped preserve individual identity in the age of Fordist standardization and Soviet leveling, producing a nation of Huck Finns and Holden Caulfields (Medovoi 2005). In short, literary culture fostered rebellion through the private expression and appreciation of idiosyncrasy, the kind of rebellion that rarely caught the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

This commitment to literary self-cultivation derived from a clear class basis. As literary individualism rose to prominence, popular works such as *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) by David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney; *White Collar* (1951) by C. Wright Mills; *The Organization Man* (1956) by William H. Whyte; and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) by Sloan Wilson all bemoaned the loss of the entrepreneurial individual after the rise of large corporations. Andrew Hoberek points out that this narrative of decline emerged out of the history of the professional-managerial class: the old middle class of small business owners gave way to the new middle class of white-collar workers, leaving the new class formation without capital and therefore vulnerable to proletarianization (2005, 8). Although the ideology of American individualism originated in the eighteenth century, its postwar articulation responded to the worries of workers whose livelihood depended not on ownership of capital or productive labor power but instead on more subjective properties. Professionals were hired for their mental acumen, their education and experience, their winning personalities. Alienated from economic capital, the professional-managerial class relied on what would come to be known as human capital. If they could not run an actual business, they could run their lives like a firm. While industrial workers strove to seize the means of production, professional-managerial workers longed to take back control over themselves by asserting their individuality in their private lives.

As one might expect, literary individualism prized works that helped develop individuality while devaluing works that seemed to threaten it. Critics therefore placed pornography, along with more common *bête noires* such as kitsch or mass culture, in direct opposition to the literary. We can see why in *Obscenity and Public Morality* (1969) by Harry Clor, perhaps the most sophisticated defense of censorship under *Roth v. United States*. Clor equates obscenity with antihumanism: the obscene transforms private, meaningful human events into a public spectacle that degrades

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them to “a sub-human or merely physical level” (1969, 225). Obscenity takes the purely external view of the onlooker, the outsider who sees anatomy rather than love. Pornography thus divorces the object of this “depersonalized sexual desire” from any human context, turning him or her into a soulless body and disintegrating that body into its constituent parts, rendering it “a thing or a collection of things, completely controlled and manipulated by another” (238–42). Clor presents obscenity as a danger to the subject’s organic wholeness, simplifying and repurposing a Marxist humanist notion of alienation for conservative ends. This notion of pornographic self-estrangement would become the common-sense understanding of obscenity, reappearing in thinkers as divergent as neoconservative Irving Kristol (1971, 24) and radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon (1989, 209–11).⁸

During this period, however, other critical views began to emerge. “The Pornographic Imagination” by Susan Sontag concedes everything to pornography’s opponents—we learn, for example, that “pornography is a theatre of types, never of individuals” (1969, 51)—and yet comes to radically different conclusions. Sontag argues that pornography offers an exploration of “extreme forms of consciousness that transcend social personality and psychological individuality” (44), modes of experience systematically denied by secular modernity. Sontag’s essay, undoubtedly informed by French structuralism, indexes a movement away from individualist ideology and toward what would come to be called the death of the subject.

This break in US literary values, however, was not simply the product of a new critical trend or a change in literary fashion. If you examine the titles cited in the death of the subject narratives, a trend emerges. Sontag’s essay references *Madame Edwanda* (1964) by Georges Bataille (published in excerpt by *Evergreen Review*), *Story of O* (1965) by Pauline Réage, and *The Image* (1966) by Jean de Berg (1969, 36). Leslie Fiedler (1999) offers remarks on the oeuvres of Burroughs, Jean Genet, and Edward Albee (1999, 204). In his landmark study of postmodern literature, Ihab Hassan finds “self-parody, self-subversion, and self-transcendence” (1971, 258) in authors such as Burroughs, Genet, and Beckett. Michel Foucault alludes to “Texts for Nothing” (1967) by Beckett (Foucault 1984, 120). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari draw upon *Molloy* (1959) and *The Unnameable* (1959) by Beckett, *Naked Lunch* (1962) by Burroughs, and *Sexus* (1965) by Miller (1983, 9, 71, 133; 1987, 134, 150, 173). Bersani carefully reads

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Funeral Rites (1969) by Genet (1996, 158).⁹ And, of course, countless antihumanists invoke the name of de Sade. Here it becomes clear that Grove translated, published, or republished many of the key works in the antihumanist network of citations. In effect, as Loren Glass argues, Grove's "vulgar modernism" functioned as a "transitional formation" (2013, 128), bridging the gap between high modernism and postmodernism. While it is true Grove's publications of French antihumanists were limited—the press published Roland Barthes's 1958 essay on Grove author Alain Robbe-Grillet as well as Maurice Blanchot's influential Beckett review, "Where Now? Who Now?" (1959)—these examples suggest that Grove did establish the preconditions for the philosophy's emergence in the United States, rendering the subject's death imaginable, even desirable, in literature.

We see this change in Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, which Rosset considered one of Grove's most important books. As with many of the press's publications, Miller's book had been published before: deemed obscene in the United States, it appeared in France in 1934 under Obelisk Press. Championing *Tropic* in the courts, Grove succeeded in having the ban overturned, bringing the book back into the public conversation. In effect, Grove reframed this and many other reprinted or translated publications for its own purposes.¹⁰ Like Grove's, Miller's project is to recover everything that has been previously edited out of literature, and his work thus dwells on material deemed worthless, subjects falling outside the canons of taste and propriety, including images and concepts that fail to conform to the prevailing standards of humanism. In contrast to petit-bourgeois individualism, which saw personal life as a utopian space outside the ravages of capitalism, a place where one could transcend one's social situation through intimate life or private thought (Zaretsky 1976, 74), Miller rejects personal dissent as an escapist reverie tolerated only insofar as it doesn't interfere with production. He thus moves to cancel the difference between thought and life, fusing the two together through obscenity, which not only works to collapse the private and the public but also stands in the ambiguous zone between action and expression. Anticipating the legal theories of censorship advocates, Miller argues that obscenity conveys physical effects rather than mental or emotional ones, making it more akin to conduct than speech (Schauer 1979, 922–23). "This is not a book," Miller announces at the start: "No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Destiny,

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Time, Love, Beauty" (1961a, 2). Eschewing the paradoxical stance of the New Critics or the ironic one of the New York Intellectuals, Miller constructs a literature of corporeal engagement, the kind of aesthetic that later would be championed by Antonin Artaud in *The Theater and Its Double* (1958) and Sontag in her *Evergreen Review* essay "Against Interpretation" (1964). More than just a mental worker's overvaluation of the body, his book wants to close the fissure between the personal realm and capitalist labor, to overcome the "discrepancy . . . between ideas and living" (Miller 1961a, 242).

Rather than carve out a space away from the depredations of capitalism, as bourgeois individualism sought to do, Miller's method is to mirror these processes, pushing them to the point of intolerability. With "cool scientific detachment" (144), Miller observes white-collar labor expanding to colonize intimate life so that sex becomes interminable work abstracted from any purpose or end; as he watches two people coupling, for example, he can think only of the printing presses at his job, endlessly spitting out newspapers. Passages like these led Kate Millett to condemn Miller's sex scenes as a "gray abstraction of 'organ grinding'" (1970, 300), characters becoming reduced to sets of organs, combined and recombined with other sets.¹¹ Here obscenity directly opposes the humanist aesthetics of midcentury critics. While Lionel Trilling lobbied for a literature of "variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty" (1950, xx–xxi), and John Crowe Ransom confronted utilitarian rationality with a poetics of particularity, one in which the "poem celebrates the object which is real, individual, and qualitatively infinite" (2008, 60), pornography boils down all of those differences, leaving nothing but undifferentiated sex, Miller's sexual actors appearing as fungible as labor, money, and newspaper copy.

As George Orwell's review of the book's initial publication by French publisher Obelisk Press suggests, Miller demonstrates total "acceptance" of the world, regardless of questions of utility or virtue, and thus becomes "passive to experience" (1971, 12). While Orwell presented this as a critique, Miller's refusal to act, negate, or resist proved integral to his politics and aesthetics. In "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" (1964) he argues that, when the entire world has become obscene, the reproduced image of obscenity allows the artist to bring that fact into awareness and move beyond it. Far from flinching from the degradations of white collar and lumpen existence, Miller affirms and even luxuriates

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in them, an accelerationist strategy that derives masochistic pleasure from taking capitalism through to its logical and ultimately self-destructive conclusions, and finding a way out through its gleeful pursuit of the worst. For Miller, obscenity unleashes transforming forces outside the artist's control, constituting "the agony of death" but also "the preconscious writhing in the face of a life to be" (1964, 188) as an antihumanism promising transcendence through debasement.

For all of his sadistic outbursts in *Cancer*, then, Miller's most characteristic posture is that of a stricken spectator, enduring and enjoying some shocking scene from a rapidly shrinking distance. His encounters with the traumatic begin with detachment and end with absorption and identification so that, as when he observes a woman's vulva, he comes to imagine himself as broken in two: "A glance at that dark, unstitched wound and a deep fissure in my brain opens up" (1961a, 246). In this misogynistic moment, Miller undergoes the psychic disintegration procensorship authors have long warned about. And, tellingly, he figures this breakdown as the undoing of clerical labor. The "fissure" that opens in Miller undoes a sort of mental filing system, and repressed thoughts burst out: "All the images and memories that had been laboriously or absentmindedly assorted, labeled, documented, filed, sealed and stamped break forth." This hallucination prompts Miller to entertain a "suicidal wish," a desire "to flow on, one with time, to merge the great image of the beyond with the here and now," a yearning for death he names "the obscenity that is ecstasy" (258). Here, Miller's masochism is bound up with the desire to relinquish power and the active, agential self that power helps call into being. Abandoning a white-collar ethic of distanced critical nonconformism, Miller gives up his independent existence to merge with the other.

Obscenity threatens the self through both its formalism and its formlessness. Pornographic abstraction vacates the self of particularity while pornographic abjection dissolves its boundaries. Yet while the novel clearly levels a critique against humanism, it does so in the service of a covert universalism with the potential to become nearly as mystificatory. Published by a press that printed work by so few women authors, Miller's masochistic martyrdom ostensibly allows him to inhabit the body of a woman, giving up his own masculine position. Fiedler enjoys a similar fantasy, his 1966 essay "The New Mutants" asserting that the prevalence of pornography points to the beginning of a "post-human" (1999, 192) era

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and the extinction of the rational ego found in the mythology of white, bourgeois, Protestant men. Recycling and revalorizing the old tropes of masculinity in crisis literature, Fiedler claims that the explosion of obscenity signals white men's collapse into passive and irrational alterity, a state in which they are rendered feminized, homosexual, childish, mad, and black. Obscenity allows these men to seem to free themselves from their class and gender standpoints, to promise entry, that is, into a condition not fundamentally different from the naturalized private sphere of bourgeois individualism.¹² The lash of the whip leaves an unmarked subject.

The white-collar masochist had good reason to want to become other. In one Grove advertisement, a *Mad Magazine*-style cartoon tells the story of a young IBM executive trying to slum it in a beatnik café. He wears a polka-dotted bow tie and complains about the price of coffee, but what really marks him as a square is his taste in literature. Joining a group of hipsters chatting about books, he interjects, "Boy, that Edna Ferber is one hell of a writer!" (O'Donoghue and Springer 1965). He is laughed out of the coffee house and returns home to an apartment filled with markers of uncool taste—a "Walter Keene" painting, Glen Miller records, a collection of old *National Geographic* magazines—where he sits and stew: "What's wrong with me? Well built! Nail down 15 thou a year!" That's when he has an epiphany: he can buy an *Evergreen Review* subscription! When he returns to the café, he rattles off a list of Grove authors, flooring all the hipsters, and the strip ends with a curvy woman in a black turtleneck hanging around his neck, as he exclaims, "I'm hip!" Modeled on self-improvement programs like those of Charles Atlas, and promising that a subscription will lead to a "vital and more interesting you," the ad is obviously a parody—a goofy caricature of Sartre looms over the panels—but it nevertheless plays to the press's real concerns. Shedding his sappy, sentimental, middlebrow sensibilities, the managerial subject can, despite his class position, aspire to pass as a down-and-out bohemian. The white-collar masochist, it seems, longed to be someone else.

Beyond an aspiration toward hipness, Grove's attempts to kill the subject derive from the politics of its implied readership. From the Port Huron Statement to the Weather Underground, the radical middle class displayed a profound ambivalence about its own class position. Barbara and John Ehrenreich describe a "guilty self-effacement on the part of PMC [professional-managerial class] radicals" (1979, 45), while Catherine Liu sees in them a "radical self-loathing" (2011, 183). It is no surprise why

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the US middle class might hate itself: authors, sociologists, and political thinkers cast that midcentury middle stratum either as a class of toadies, bloodsuckers, and fascists-in-waiting or as a group of feckless rubes and arch-philistines, exemplified by such literary unfortunates as Willy Loman and George F. Babbitt. Burroughs, to take just one example, announced that he was “all for eliminating the whole stupid middle-class” (2001, 111). Many Marxist and Movement radicals, moreover, considered the middle class a phantom, a temporary aberration that would disappear with the sharpening of class contradictions, or a purely ideological category upheld by anticommunists as proof of Marxism’s irrelevance. Former Grove Press editor Harry Braverman, for example, predicted in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* that “middle layer” (1998, 282) employees would become increasingly proletarianized, a historical process that would dispose of the middle class with all of its attendant conceptual and political problems. And many radicals would have been happy to see them go. While the immiseration of the proletariat could be dialectically transformed into its revolutionary strength, the psychological misery of the desk jockeys was derided as a distraction from more objective concerns. At the very least, if the professional-managerial class was not an external enemy or an ideological construct, it was a formation to be overcome.

This explains at least part of the reason the Cuban Revolution loomed so large at Grove: at a moment in which the middle class posed a problem for left-wing politics, the *fidelistas* showed that doctors and lawyers could disappear into the mountains and return as hardened revolutionaries. As Van Gosse shows, many artists and intellectuals in the United States first received Fidel Castro as a kind of hipster, a hypermasculine figure whose beatnik beard and seemingly ambiguous revolution—initially allied with neither Washington nor Moscow—made him a “rebel without a cause” (1993, 55). When US leftists looked south, what they saw often had more to do with their own fantasies and desires than with Cuban politics. LeRoi Jones’s (Amiri Baraka’s) *Evergreen Review* essay “Cuba Libre” (1960), for example, quickly becomes a meditation on the author’s class anxieties and his place within literary culture. Arriving in Cuba in 1960, Jones finds himself branded a “cowardly bourgeois individualist” by revolutionary poets who ask him, “In that ugliness you live in, you want to cultivate your soul?” (Jones 1968, 346). In response, Jones rejects the private rebellions of the Beats and other bohemians, as representing quietism at best and complicity at worst. For artists and other professionals, Cuba offers a

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clear way out of this predicament: they can join the revolution. In Grove Press's *Revolution in the Revolution?* by Régis Debray, we thus find that "the first rule of guerilla life is that no one survives alone. The group's interest is the interest of each one, and vice versa. To live and conquer is to live and conquer all together. . . . Under these conditions class egoism does not long endure. Petty bourgeois psychology melts like snow under the summer sun, undermining the ideology of the same stratum" (1967, 110–11). If the labor process fails to dissolve the professional-managerial class, then military praxis will do just as well.

Barring revolution, then, the only way out for the managerial subject was to narrate its own demise. Grove accomplished this trick by publishing works that imagined the professional-managerial class's failure either to accomplish its job duties or to culturally reproduce itself, and thus Grove's works are filled with scenes of botched management or sabotaged pedagogy. Representing a class that finds its ideological justification as well as its livelihood in education, the managerial subject dreams of unteachable students forever in need of rough discipline. Self-sabotage thus becomes a means of rebellion and refusal, the managerial subject finding power in the masochistic passivity of its absorption into the corporate world. For example, parodying Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) in *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs advises office employees to use audio suggestion techniques to get ahead, to splice the sounds of coworkers with their own to achieve subconscious identification: "Become the breathing word and the beating heart of that organization become that organization" (1967, 219).¹³ Having engaged the reader, Burroughs quickly turns then from giving tips to up-and-comers ("Suppose you are some creep in a grey flannel suit you want to present a new concept of advertising to the old man" [221]) to promulgating methods for inciting riots and subverting ideological messages. The class charged with maintaining capitalist relations also holds the potential to bring everything down, not because of its independence but, rather, because it is so implicated in capitalism that even its private life has become integrated into its workings. While other white-collar employees might dream about retreating into the suburban pastoral, then, Grove's organization men fantasize about falling down on the job. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, working as a hiring manager at a telegraph company, Miller brings the system to a halt by hiring the most incompetent of workers: "I laughed all day thinking what a fine stinking mess I was making of it" (1961b, 28–29). In such ways these novels offer a kind

of managerial potlatch—a lavishly wasteful expenditure of company resources that also characterized its publisher.

Although Grove employees never set out to wreck the business, they often placed pleasure over profits. Rather than demanding financial reports predicting how well prospective books would sell, for instance, the editorial staff ignored publishing best practices to rely instead on their own tastes or preferences. Rosset, according to S. E. Gontarski, “personalized publishing, made it an extension of his will, psyche, and libido” (2001, xiv). Often, Rosset would approve books based only on a meeting of a few minutes, demonstrating an impulsiveness that brooked no interference and disregarded financial consequences.¹⁴ Indeed, Grove’s catalog was filled with books all of the other publishers rejected, not only controversial or obscene ones but also books that seemed like commercial losers to everyone else. Grove’s dealings did often involve some economic calculation: because some authors were desperate and many had already published their books overseas, their publication rights could be acquired at rock-bottom prices or, in the case of works without copyright protection, for free. Nevertheless, as *Newsweek* reported, Rosset had “no intention of making each [book] pay its own way” (quoted in Gontarski 2001, xii). This policy remained in place throughout Rosset’s tenure, forcing the editor to subsidize the company with his own private wealth as it hemorrhaged money.

Being guided by interests other than financial won Grove cultural capital, with which it secured long-lasting business relationships with authors who might otherwise have moved on to bigger and better-paying publishers as their literary fortunes improved. And its pursuit of banned books stirred up free publicity that made Grove publications like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* instant bestsellers (Ellis 1988, 35–36). But in defying conventional aesthetic values and holding market ones in abeyance, Grove could become such an artistic and political force only because it allowed itself to fail. *SCREW* magazine publisher Al Goldstein, speaking with characteristic delicacy, called Rosset “the worst, most fucked-up businessman in America” (*Obscene* 2007). It turned out that a truly subversive entrepreneur must also be a self-liquidating one.

In *Naked Lunch*, this dynamic animates Burroughs’s Dr. Benway, a scientist, medical doctor, and a “manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems” (1962, 20). This description identifies Dr. Benway’s class position by echoing the term *symbol-manipulator*, *Playboy* editor A. C. Spector’s designation for the professional-managerial worker (1955, 7). Dr. Benway

attempts to engineer entire societies, but these hyperbolic scenes of total control serve only to unleash anarchy, and Burroughs's gloriously failed professionals tell us something about the nature of sadism. Sadism makes for the most energy-intensive mode of domination possible, such that the dominator is compelled to stand over the submissive to micromanage every move. In de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* (1966), for example, the aristocrats spend an inordinate amount of time fussing about their charges' bathroom habits. In such ways Sadistic mastery flirts with its own reversal through its sensationalism and extravagance, an ostentation that exhausts the dominator while emboldening the submissive. As Dr. Benway puts it, "Torture locates the opponent and mobilizes resistance" (Burroughs 1962, 23). We can read Grove's sadism, then, as expressing a more fundamental masochism (see Bersani 1996, 95–96).

In many ways, Grove was a masochistic company, giving itself over to organizational failure with reckless abandon. We can see this reflected in its numerous SM novels, which run counter to liberal narratives of self-development and success. Elizabeth Freeman points out that SM works to undo chrononormative models of progress and maturation, destabilizing both historical and biographical temporalities (2010, 143). In Grove's scenarios the submissive often remains in perpetual training, never quite obtaining mastery over herself or her world. Travestyng bildungsroman novels and conversion narratives, the masochistic character moves from enlightened autonomy to Gothic subjugation, returning to obsolete disciplinary technologies that replace more subtle forms of power with overt and spectacular domination. As in Beckett's novels and plays, the masochist is drawn toward absolute helplessness, confinement, and constraint, a reduction in circumstances running precisely counter to the normalized coming-of-age story. Unable or unwilling to internalize norms, the masochistic subject veers off from conventional life paths to remain under tutelage (Halberstam 2011, 130–31).

Tropic of Cancer, for example, features an author-protagonist who enjoys being an unappreciated starving artist, arrested in a preparatory stage for his career under the patronage of the cold and distant figure of Mona. This masochistic dynamic structures the novel's form. We see Miller's preparation to become a great author but never the moment of his artistic success, while Miller as a personality remains in a state of becoming, half-formed and self-refuting, reinventing himself over and over again (Marzoni 2014, 193). Fragmented, episodic, and unpolished, *Cancer* follows no clearly discernible biographical or narrative development, and

the text's refusal of a more finished form duplicates the author's rejection of self-improvement: "I have made a compact with myself not to change a line of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, nor my actions" (Miller 1961a, 11). A novel about the author's failure to launch, *Cancer* also depicts Miller's pleasure in that failure, his wallowing in his own ineptness. Thus, what sets out to be a hymn of praise for Mona ends only in her disappointment and disgrace, as if inviting her to punish its author.

Miller's masochism resists life trajectories ordered by linear, teleological progression toward competent, professional adulthood, a rejection of chrononormativity that holds a specific political import for the professional-managerial class. Although all workers might be defined by the chronology of the résumé, white-collar workers especially acquire economic power through an ever-increasing accumulation of human capital, a journey that begins in school and continues up the job ladder. A reworking of the Horatio Alger narrative, the accumulation of human capital justifies income inequality as a function of differences in investments in education, training, or experience: greater earnings accrue properly to those in higher positions, requiring more skill and experience. Grove's masochistic novels, however, feature downwardly mobile characters whose rigorous discipline serves only to exhaust their potential under the service of arbitrary masters. The schools of misrule operating in so many of these texts thus work to disrupt transmissions of a cultural inheritance predicated on generational continuity and social reproduction (Ferguson 1991, 3).¹⁵ In de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, a dramatic dialogue featuring a young virgin's miseducation by libertines, the author, for instance, exhorts readers "to destroy, to spurn all those ridiculous precepts inculcated in you by imbecile parents" (1965, 185), and the submissive forgets more than she learns, becoming increasingly unfit for socially or economically productive life. Even subjects who begin their masochistic training as capable professionals typically end by retreating into hapless servitude, like the protagonist of *The Story of O*, who begins as a skilled, self-assured professional but, by the end of her SM training, has thrown away her career and, in one of the book's endings, her life. Masochism negates human capital analysis point for point, stripping the entrepreneurial self of rational choice, disrupting the process of cumulative skill building, and halting the subject's movement along a path toward more remunerative prospects. Grove yearns for, as the title of one Jones (Baraka) short story identifies it, "The Death of Horatio Alger."¹⁶

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With the waning of the 1960s, this fantasy would collapse. In April of 1970, Robin Morgan and several other Grove employees were terminated after they reached out to the Furriers, Leather, Machinists Joint Board (AFL-CIO) to organize a union. Although the company claimed that the firings were not retaliatory, Morgan reports they were precipitated by Rosset's discovery of an article by Ellen Smith Mendocino—reprinted in the April 1970 issue of *Rat Subterranean News*—detailing the press's exploitation of women both as employees and as sex objects (Lederer 1980, 268).¹⁷ Morgan denied any connection with the piece, but it clearly anticipated her later criticism of the press. Mendocino's "A Feminist Takes on the Evergreen" hits Grove right where it hurts, ruthlessly laying bare the press's humiliating contradiction: "While putting down the ethos of middle class commercialism in its articles and fiction, Evergreen turns around and sells itself by the worst sort of pandering to that ethos" (Mendocino 1970). The article casts Grove's demographic as grasping salesmen and grubby backroom dealers, dirty old men in a moment when countercultural radicals refused to trust anyone over the age of thirty.

After the firings, Morgan and a group of activists including Ti-Grace Atkinson occupied the press's offices, issuing an extensive list of demands. Their statement condemns Rosset and other staff members as "wealthy capitalist dirty old straight white men" before excoriating *Evergreen* authors for selling a "hypocritical radicalism" to fund their "cushy lifestyles": "No more wearing of a radical mask by these exploiters to cover the sexist leer, the racist smirk, the boss-man's frown!" (quoted in Lederer 1980, 271). In a later essay, Morgan articulated her thoughts on the sexual practices featured in Grove fiction, discounting the notion that men can achieve "woman-identification" through masochism:

He who has power can do what he likes, *including playing at powerlessness in a manner never available to the powerless*. For him it can be an experiment, a game, a fad, a fake (or even genuine) attempt to divest himself of his power, or a mere kinky new experience. It can be whatever he likes or imagines to be, because it is his choice, by nature temporary and dismissible the instant it no longer amuses him. (1978, 236)

For Morgan, this masochism is just another masculine prerogative; no amount of vicarious suffering can produce real solidarity between oppressor and oppressed.¹⁸

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Radical feminists would soon face a class problem of their own, however, one that looked remarkably like Grove's. Grappling with economic inequality, many feminist organizations shed members, fostered seething resentments, or simply foundered and split (Echols 1989, 204–10). Looking back on this period, Morgan decried its "Failure Vanguardism," a "suicidal" impulse that finds radicalism only in personal and political dysfunction (1978, 113). Even as they rejected Grove, then, many feminists reworked its characteristic postures. And with the fragmentation of early radical feminism, it was antipornography campaigns that seemed to offer a way out of this self-defeating impasse. Where Grove deployed antihumanist obscenity to blur the distinction between its imagined audience and their others, cultural feminists transformed such obscenity into a superordinate, shared injury that would allow them to take up the fallen mantle of radical feminism, erase the histories of other forms of feminism, and profess to speak for women everywhere regardless of class, race, gender expression, or sexuality in the name of a new feminist humanism (Strub 2010, 237).¹⁹ Although radical feminists like Morgan may have been correct in criticizing Grove's facile attempt at becoming-woman, the unified and essentialist conception of feminine identity they proposed as an alternative turned out to be just as problematic.²⁰

Political masochism proves to be no substitute for the often unsexy work of redistributing and renegotiating power to build cross-class and cross-identity alliances. As long as Grove stayed under the near-exclusive control of affluent, white men, its radicalism would remain a problem, as became evident when management called the police, who hauled away the feminist occupiers in handcuffs. And, although the unionization drive ultimately failed, the company soon slipped into financial ruin, limping along until Rosset sold the company in 1985, and was himself fired (Glass 2013, 202–15). In dismantling the subject, Grove did clear the way for an examination of the structures that determine both intimate and professional life. But while antihumanism proved more insightful about the politics of subjectivity than the individualism it reacted against, white-collar masochism often obscured the political-economic positions of antihumanism's devotees. Through Grove publications, the white-collar masochist could cease to identify as an individual member of a dominant class and become instead a victim or a conduit for forces outside his control—Lawrence's lovers become avatars of masculine and feminine principles, Miller surrenders to flux, and Burroughs's agents and

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addicts devolve into soft machines operated by cosmic conspiracies—even as he reaps private rewards. Although this masochistic pose might promise a more sophisticated theory of power, then, it can just as easily obscure its workings. The boss always reminds us, “My hands are tied.”



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Notes

1. Although the Grove imprint predates 1951, the company published few titles and nothing of note before it was purchased and transformed by Rosset. Most critics therefore date the founding of the Grove to Rosset’s acquisition (Gontarski 2001, xv).
2. Barbara and John Ehrenreich describe the professional-managerial class as a social grouping of “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (1979, 12).
3. An abridged version of the Grove occupation’s list of demands can be found in Lederer 1980.
4. For a broader survey of the new sensibility, see Cotkin 2016.

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5. Greif defines *antihumanism* as “a principled removal of the level of explanation of phenomena from single rational human actors and their explicit self-understandings to sub- and superpersonal aggregations” (2015, 285–86). More than just a conceptual turn, however, antihumanism casts the death of the liberal subject as a sublime experience, whether it is described as *jouissance*, schizophrenia, or desubjectification.

6. Loren Glass has argued that censorship trials helped facilitate a shift “from the fading moral hegemony of the genteel bourgeoisie to the expertise-based hegemony of the professional managerial class represented, in the cultural sphere, by publishers, academics, critics, and authors” (2006, 347). According to Glass, the introduction of expert witnesses into obscenity trials allowed professionals to establish the cultural dominance of high modernism, including an aesthetic theory of Kantian disinterestedness and literary autonomy. This essay extends and resituates Glass’s analysis by showing that other critical doctrines were at play during this period—including a discourse on subjectivity—as well as by grounding the decline of the regime of value Glass describes in the contradictions of professional-managerial class politics of the late 1950s and 1960s.

7. In other words, eroticized self-mortification serves the very same function as hip identifications with African Americans in bondage. As Michael Szalay writes, “It allows the professional or manager to transcend, in an act of self-liberation, the class conflict he is paid to mediate” (2012, 185).

8. Although MacKinnon rejects the legal category of obscenity as moralistic, she nevertheless borrows antiobscenity discourse to talk about pornography. Pornography is dangerous, she suggests, not only because it strips women of selfhood—as conservatives suggest—but also because it does so to deny them full legal and political personhood.

9. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari cite Lawrence, Miller, and the Beats as examples of “men who know how to . . . traverse the desert of the body without organs” (1983, 133).

10. As D. F. McKenzie suggests, each published version of a book represents a new reading, one that responds to the concerns of its publication date (1999, 29).

11. For another perspective on pornographic abstraction, see Marcus 1964, 274.

12. For an exploration of this problem in contemporary BDSM communities, see Weiss 2011, 146.

13. For the relationship between Burroughs’s interest in Napoleon Hill and his fascination with deindividualization, see Konstantinou 2016, 132.

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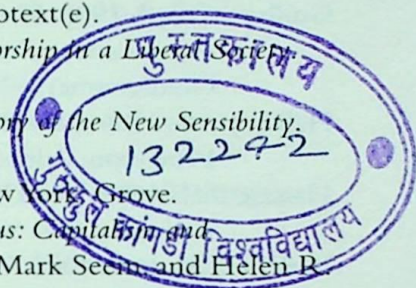
14. For a description of Grove's editorial policy and business practices, see Sorrentino 1990, 100–102.
15. Nicola Beisel argues that Anthony Comstock's antiobscenity crusade recruited middle-class parents by convincing them that "moral pollution" threatened their children's class positions, which depended on maintaining social and cultural capital (1997, 73–74).
16. Miller demonstrates a similar antipathy toward the Alger myth. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, the vice president of the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company encourages Miller's literary double to write an Alger narrative about the messengers working under him. Appalled at this suggestion, Miller concocts a plan to write an anti-Alger story: "I will give you Horatio Alger as he looks the day after the Apocalypse, when all the stink has cleared away" (Miller 1961b, 31).
17. For an account of Rosset's often problematic relationship to women, see Gontarski 2000, 15–21.
18. Rosi Braidotti leveled similar critiques at Deleuze and Derrida, who imagined becoming-woman as a means of escape from humanist subjectivity. As Braidotti argues, these antihumanists frequently treat the feminine as a metaphor for fragmentation, multiplicity, and the instability of meaning while glossing over contemporaneous developments in feminist politics (1994, 136–42). By casting themselves as becoming-women, she suggests, they succeeded in capturing the critical energies of feminist and other minoritarian struggles while sparing themselves the unpleasant prospect of grappling with their own subject positions.
19. For examples of the role of Grove authors in cultural feminist discourse, see Morgan 2001, 107–19.
20. Morgan's transphobic remarks, for example, reveal the bankruptcy of this position (1978, 180–81).

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Why She Wrote about Mexico: Katherine Anne Porter and the Literature of Experience

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In July of 1923, *Century Magazine* published a contributor's note by Katherine Anne Porter to accompany her short story "The Martyr," one of a series of texts she wrote about Mexico that appeared in the magazine in the early 1920s. In many respects this note, which Porter later republished under the title "Why I Write about Mexico," offers a criticism of prevailing attitudes toward Latin America in the interwar US cultural imaginary. Amid rising nativism and a general hostility toward foreignness—the note underscores that the author herself "ha[d] been accused by Americans of a taste for the exotic"—Porter justifies her Mexico writings by insisting on a more capacious, hemispheric definition of Americanness: "Literally speaking, I have never been out of America; but my America has been a borderland of strange tongues and commingled races, and if they are not American, I am fearfully mistaken" (2008, 870).¹ At a time when the United States had not yet granted diplomatic recognition to the Mexican government because of lingering skepticism toward the most progressive aims of the recently concluded Mexican Revolution, Porter defends the "straight, undeviating purpose [that] guided the working of the plan" (869). And in a cultural milieu almost categorically dismissive of Latin American artistic achievement, Porter champions the "renaissance of Mexican art" in the postrevolutionary period as "a veritable rebirth, very conscious, very powerful."

Yet Porter's most audacious rhetorical move in "Why I Write about Mexico" may not be to claim that her writing represents Mexican people and places marginal to what she calls at one point the "ways of the dominant race" (870) but rather to ratify that claim by maintaining she had *experienced* this entire phase of Mexican historical life firsthand. She begins by stating that she had seen the outbreak of the Mexican

Revolution on the US-Mexico border with her own eyes: "During the Madero revolution I watched a street battle between Maderistas and Federal troops from the window of a cathedral" (869). She then proceeds to say that this act of witnessing afforded her a privileged vantage point on the decade-long revolutionary process: "From that day I watched Mexico, and all the apparently unrelated events that grew out of that first struggle never seemed false or alien or aimless to me." The note's last line finally clinches this testimonial authority in literary terms, as Porter stakes the very validity of her writings about Mexico on her personal experience of the country: "All the things I write of I have first known, and they are real to me" (870).

The concluding sentence of "Why I Write about Mexico," with its declaration of an absolute fusion of life and art, writing and experience, has held an almost talismanic power over Porter criticism for the past forty years. Even as readings of Porter's work have gradually shifted focus—from formalist to feminist, from regional to transnational—scholars have continued to debate the relationship between what Porter wrote and what she knew, particularly with respect to her four extended stays in Mexico from 1920 to 1931. As more biographical information has become available about Porter's activities in Mexico, scholars have shown that she not only invented her "eyewitness account" of the outbreak of the Revolution but also omitted from the written record several real-life events—including a political intrigue involving Mexican president Álvaro Obregón—that were at least as dramatic as the fictional stories she published.² Her art did not always imitate her life, or vice versa, as perhaps we already could have guessed.

The existing scholarship on Porter has tended to view her strategic deployment of the language of experience as the particular sign of her genius, an idiosyncratic if no less integral element of her personal style. Thus, Janis Stout has spoken of Porter's "characteristic mode" as one of "highly indirect, deeply mediated autobiography" (1995, 14), and Darlene Unrue has cited the 1923 note to claim that Porter's body of work "reflected the most important experiences of her long life devoted to the artistic search for truth" ([1985] 2009, vii). Here I will take a different approach, suggesting that Porter's appeal to firsthand experience in "Why I Write about Mexico" instantiates a broader cultural practice in the interwar US literary field, one in which American writers competed to see who could best position themselves as a writer of experience. Indeed, I will argue that Porter should be situated at the

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center of a cultural formation I call the *US literature of experience*, a term that designates the range of interwar writers publishing in the United States who equated “good literature” with prolonged firsthand exposure to the places about which they were writing.³ I use this term not to replace more conventional period- or movement-based labels such as “modernism,” “Lost Generation,” “Harlem Renaissance,” or “Southern Renaissance” but to signal a shared preoccupation among writers typically affiliated with these labels with the rendering of experience into art, a concern that changed the way fiction was written and evaluated in the United States.⁴

Although the US literature of experience might seem, at first glance, like a mere prolongation of a realist/naturalist tradition under another guise, its epistemological framework rested, in fact, on very different conceptual grounds. Unlike the mode of realism most familiar to us in the nineteenth-century texts of Eliot, Balzac, and Dickens, the literature of experience depended less on an implied correspondence between text and (external) world than on the correlation between text and author—or, to be more precise (and to avoid associations with the perennial debates about authorial “intention”), between the authority of the writer and her knowledge of the places/things she has gone to/seen. Although Porter’s “Why I Write about Mexico” alerts us to how this transmutation of authorial experience into literary text often entailed a blurring of fact and fiction, I will suggest that such inventions remained constrained by the *plausible* activities of a writer as sanctioned by other actors (writers, critics, etc.) in the US literary field. For Porter to say that she had done something in Mexico that she hadn’t was one thing; for her to have written about Mexico without actually having been to the country would have been quite another. As we will see, Porter’s literature of experience owed as much to her actual spatial trajectory as it did to her ability to render that trajectory into literary form.

In this article, I treat the short stories and nonfiction prose of Porter’s so-called Mexico period—spanning from her arrival in Mexico City in 1920 to the publication of the expanded edition of *Flowering Judas* in 1935—as paradigmatic of the US literature of experience. I will offer readings of two of her Mexico-based stories, “That Tree” (1931) and “Hacienda” (1934), in the context of their production and initial reception, demonstrating that Porter embedded a series of markers attesting to her authorial experience in the texts themselves. Furthermore, I will argue that critics, journalists, and fellow US writers recognized these

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markers as essential features of her literary aesthetic. In one sense, the article aims to recapture Porter's canonicity during the interwar period, a status that might need reiterating given the relative decline of her reputation in the late twentieth century. In the 1930s and 1940s, writers and critics alike considered Porter to be one of the most important contemporary fiction writers. A preferred author of New Critics such as Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and Cleanth Brooks—Warren once described her short stories as “unsurpassed in modern fiction” ([1942] 1997, 53)—she was also the only woman writer highlighted in Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* (1934). Eudora Welty, Josephine Herbst, and Tillie Olsen all referred to her as a key modernist precursor. And Mary McCarthy's campus novel *The Groves of Academe* (1951) gives a sense of the status of Porter and her “Mexican book” in the early postwar years, telling us that when the average student at progressive Jocelyn College went to find *Flowering Judas* at the library, “he learned from the librarian that all ten copies were out: Mr. Van Tour, his tutor, was giving it in Contemporary Literature, and several of his other tutees were making it their special interest” ([1951] 1985, 78). Porter became, in many ways, uniquely positioned in the US literary field, a model for radical women authors as much as for conservative Southern gentlemen, for aspiring students as much as for writers and readers of international fiction.

I also situate Porter's Mexican writings at the center of the US literature of experience because, along with the writings of Ernest Hemingway, they served as the most successful examples of fiction set in “foreign” countries that continued to be recognized as “American” literature *because* they were filtered through the “felt experience” of a US writer. Although in the global twenty-first century this ambition may strike us as anachronistic—and perhaps even undesirable—Porter and Hemingway spent a great deal of energy and craft trying to reconcile their transnational fiction with the growing demand for a national body of American literature. It is telling in this regard that Porter's experiential creed, “All the things I write of I have first known,” which so closely resembles the MFA slogan “write what you know,” was framed as an explanation of why she wrote about Mexico rather than the United States. We tend to associate the injunction to “write what you know” with a domestic logic of literary production, and, indeed, in *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009), Mark McGurl traces the phrase to the pragmatist-inflected creative writing programs of the interwar period. But although McGurl makes a persuasive case for the role

US institutions played in inculcating the authority of personal experience in the postwar era, his focus on the self-generating “autopoetic” (2009, 18) system of the creative writing program glosses over the way the very principle of “writing what you know” was forged in broader geopolitical contexts. In this respect, it should be recalled that the mid-century writers and critics who institutionalized interwar modernism in the United States trained their attention to an extraordinary degree on the international works of “expatriate” writers. As we will see, this is as true for Porter as it is for Hemingway, that modernist master of the discourse of experience who wrote to Maxwell Perkins from France in 1928 that “whatever success I have had has been through writing what I know about” (1981, 274). If, as McGurl states, “it would be hard to overestimate the influence of Hemingway on postwar writers” (2009, 65), I would argue that the influence of Hemingway—and Porter—was largely due to their methods of focalizing their fiction through the experiences of “Americans abroad.”

Identifying Porter’s role in the development of the US literature of experience will require us to pay attention to two intersecting narratives of early twentieth-century literary culture. In the first place, we must situate her among several waves of US writer-journalists who traveled to Mexico in the early decades of the twentieth century, from the initial stirrings of revolutionary activity during the final years of Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship to the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution in the early 1930s. The cultural historian Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has observed that, as the scene of the first major popular revolution of the twentieth century, post-1910 Mexico attracted an extraordinary number of foreign observers, intellectuals, and politicians, helping to define “new connotations of paramount modernist concepts” such as “the popular,” the “avant-garde,” and even “revolution” itself (2012, 94). I will argue here that US writers went to Mexico not only out of sympathy with the aims of the revolution or its various factions but also to position themselves as firsthand experiencers of Mexico’s politico-cultural revolution. Porter’s writings of the 1920s and 1930s, I will suggest, both recapitulate and transform these earlier US writings about Mexico, converting their search for meaning through experience into fictional form.

At the same time, we will need to analyze Porter’s travels to Mexico in relation to the European itinerary that was often taken to be synonymous with interwar US modernism—in the literary works of such authors as Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, as well as influential critical accounts such as Cowley’s *Exile’s Return*. As “Why I Write about

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Mexico" implies, US writing about Latin America in the interwar period was frequently defined by what it was not—and if it could perhaps be literature about "America" with enough semantic sleight-of-hand, it was *definitely* not literature about the Old World. Porter's writings of the 1920s and 1930s often cast her Mexican formation as a counterpoint to the typical trajectory of 1920s expatriate US writers. Indeed, later in life she elaborated a full-fledged critique of the US literary establishment's consecration of what she dubbed, in relation to *Exile's Return*, that "strange American migration to Europe during the 1920s" (2008, 1010). In this retrospective essay entitled "Land That Is Nowhere," she attacks Cowley's canonical "attempts to set all American writers or painters or critics who happened to travel during that ill-starred decade into a careful theory of motive" (2008, 1011), noting that his exilic model of transatlantic crossings had little in common with her own itinerary. Implying that Cowley had included her in his study as an "afterthought" for reasons of both gender and geography, she countered his conclusion that "Mexico City was her Paris, and Taxco her South of France" by unequivocally rejecting the principle of equivalence: "I am able only to say: No. Mexico City was my well-loved Mexico City." As Porter's work was incorporated into the US literary canon in the 1930s and 1940s, her insistence on the specificity of her Latin American trajectory increasingly became an interpretive stumbling block for US literary critics. In the final section of the article, I examine how New Critics such as Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate "disciplined" Porter's literature of experience, redescribing her emphasis on the correlation between writing and firsthand knowledge of place as an element of her textual style. Revisiting Porter's Mexican writings will help us reconsider not only dominant narratives of US interwar literature but also the interpretive paradigms of the post-1945 period to which they gave rise.

Her own account

When Katherine Anne Porter crossed the border into Mexico in late 1920, she was embarking on the same path that many US writers had taken before her. They had come, like Stephen Crane, Jack London, and John Kenneth Turner, during the thirty-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz; they had come, like John Reed, Lincoln Steffens, Carleton Beals, and Langston Hughes, during the tumultuous decade of revolution. And they would later come, like Alma Reed, John Dos Passos, Anita

Brenner, Waldo Frank, Archibald MacLeish, and Hart Crane, during the agitated postrevolutionary period of social transformation and artistic innovation. As scholars such as Helen Delpar, John Britton, and Rachel Adams have shown, during the 1910s and 1920s a wide array of intellectuals, journalists, and novelists traveled to Mexico to witness the revolution and its aftermath, fueling debates about the conflict's main actors and political programs that filled the pages of mainstream and radical magazines alike.⁵ For those on the Left, this journey across the Rio Grande in the mid-teens held a special appeal. Mexico offered what the United States lacked: a massive popular uprising linked to demands for land redistribution, anti-imperialism, and grassroots political changes. For more than a decade, Mexico therefore occupied a role that Russia, Cuba, China, and others would serve over the course of the twentieth century: a place for US journalists, writers, intellectuals, and activists to experience firsthand the political and social revolution they envisioned for the United States. Indeed, by the mid-1910s, as Mexican forces began to coalesce around popular revolutionary figures such as Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza whose political manifestos increasingly began to attract the American Left, the appeal to on-the-ground experience became something of an industry standard for articles on Mexico. For instance, an editorial note in *Everybody's Magazine* preceding Lincoln Steffens's 1916 article "Into Mexico and Out" not only trumpeted the leading muckraking reporter's "record in digging the truth out of complicated situations" but also specified that "for five months Mr. Steffens has been traveling in Mexico with Carranza" (1916, 533). As US journalists attempted to parse the complex factionalism of the revolution, giving a "balanced viewpoint" entailed seeking out firsthand contact with the various contenders in the revolutionary struggle as well as entertaining competing versions of events.

Porter's writings of the early 1920s suggest that she was aware of the competition among US writers to capture the most unfiltered view of the upheaval occurring across the border and was eager to compete. Shortly after she arrived in Mexico City in 1920, she met Steffens, whom she dubbed the "follower of revolutions," and wrote in her notebook: "I mean to write fully some day the inside story of this show. It is more improbable than a legend, and more amusing than Lincoln Steffen's [sic] stories, and more tragic than any Golgotha ever dreamed of" (Porter 1920–21). Over the course of her travels to Mexico from 1920 to 1931, as the combat phase of the revolution gradually receded into the past, Porter

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became increasingly ambivalent not just about the “straight, undeviating path” of the revolution’s aims but also the ways that foreign writers—and particularly US ones—depicted it. If Porter attributed the failures of these writers to a variety of errors and biases, her major concern was to prove that writing about the transformations of 1920s Mexico necessitated prolonged immersion in the country rather than hasty, ideological, or derivative impressions of it. This was a concern that was as much aesthetic as it was ethical and political. In another notebook entry of 1920, she wrote:

Why not story on impossibility of writing a story at short notice on Mexico. Maybe I shall write a few, but curiously enough— It may be five years before I can really write about Mexico. I am not one of those amazing folk who can learn people or countries in a fortnight. . . . I want first of all to discover for myself what this country is. Everybody I meet tells me a different story. *Nothing is for me but to wait, and gather my own account.*” (emphasis mine)

Here we encounter in embryo many of the strategies that Porter would eventually employ in her fiction and journalism about Mexico. In addition to offering a program for acquiring material for her work through a kind of slow distillation of her personal experience of Mexico—perhaps five years, she says, to fully “gather her own account”—she also signals that her fiction might function as a critique of non-Mexican stories about the country “written at short notice,” and suggests how reflexive literary techniques (the “story on the impossibility of writing a story”) could help her differentiate between superficial and profound accounts of Mexico among foreign observers. Tenorio-Trillo convincingly situates Porter among those foreign writers who “claimed to be authentic discoverers of Mexico, as opposed to either fake idealizers or insurgent bashers of Mexico” (2012, 165). Rather than judging Porter for these claims, though, I want to describe how she turned them into literary techniques, how her vision became, in many ways, *the* US modernist vision of postrevolutionary Mexico.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Porter’s Mexico stories of the 1920s and 1930s is that they are nearly all versions of the *roman à clef*, narratives that represent real-life people and events in fictional form. “The Martyr” (1923) is a thinly veiled satire of Mexican muralist Diego

Rivera and his model and wife Lupe Marín; “That Tree” (1934) models its protagonists on the famous Mexico-based US journalist Carleton Beals; and, as Thomas Walsh has shown, “Flowering Judas” (1930) uses composite portraits of US journalists Alma Reed and Mary Doherty, and well-known Mexican radicals Samuel Yúdice and Luis Morones, to create the characters of the American Laura and the Mexican revolutionary Braggioni. In 1943, Porter remarked of her composition process for “Flowering Judas”: “All the characters and episodes are based on real persons and events, but naturally, as my memory worked upon them and time passed . . . the order and meaning of the episodes changed, and became in a word fiction” (2008, 716). Commenting on this assertion and Porter’s later claim that “my fiction is reportage, only I do something to it,” Walsh argues that “‘Flowering Judas’ is not historical fiction that fixes on a specific time in Mexican history, but intentionally obscures and rewrites history to make it conform to fictional needs” (1992, 122). Yet this seems to miss the point that by modeling the vast majority of her characters on real-life figures in the contemporary Mexican scene—and repeatedly saying she was doing so—Porter was in a way inviting this very confusion between her fiction and her biography. As Sean Latham observes, the “roman à clef ultimately depends for definition on . . . the introduction of a key that lies beyond the diegesis itself” (2009, 7), a verification process that forces the reader from internal plot dynamics to the historical people and events the narrative encodes. That Porter was writing first-person essays and articles for many of the same US magazines where her stories appeared—as in the pairing of “Why I Write about Mexico” and “The Martyr” in *The Century Magazine*’s July 1923 issue—made a conflation between what she had experienced and what she had invented all the more probable. Judging from reviews of *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1935), readers did in fact have trouble separating Porter’s fiction about Mexico from her experience of it. Edith Walton’s review of the expanded edition in the *New York Times* provides a typical example of this conflation: “Apparently Miss Porter is thoroughly familiar with the raggle-taggle of American radicals, artists, and writers who haunt Mexico City” (1935). Porter’s variation on the roman à clef entailed realigning the relationship between fact and fiction along a geographical axis: her US audience would have to seek the extradiegetic key to her texts in their Mexican contexts. Taken as a whole, her Mexican writings articulate a literary mode that we might call the expatriate roman à clef.

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In the expatriate roman à clef, Porter found a mode that allowed her to both *authenticate* her firsthand knowledge of Mexico—on the principle that “all the things [she] wrote about [she] had first known”—and to *authorize* her “own account” of postrevolutionary Mexico against the narratives of other US writers and journalists. Nowhere does this appear more clearly than in “That Tree” (1934). The story is ostensibly about a typical maladjusted expatriate American in Mexico City: a journalist who longs to be a poet, a student of revolutions who gets the jitters when he hears explosions, a potential Lothario who cannot find the means to break away from his narrow-minded midwestern wife back home. Porter later wrote, “That has for its hero something like ten thousand wistful American boys who have been brought up in dull ways and dull surroundings, and are infected with the notion that romance and glory lie in other places, and in a different occupation” (quoted in Walsh 1992, 169). Yet the implied universality of this statement—“something like ten thousand wistful American boys”—belies the specificity of the actual profile of the unnamed protagonist in the story’s opening lines: “An important journalist, an authority on Latin-American revolutions and a best seller” (Porter 2008, 72). In fact, the only plausible candidate for this description was Porter’s erstwhile friend Carleton Beals, who had become perhaps the most prominent US journalist writing on Latin America, the author of numerous nonfiction books on postrevolutionary Mexico as well as the Sandino rebellion in Nicaragua and the 1933 Cuban Revolution. This interplay of fact and fiction, universality of motive and particularity of experience, was crucial to contemporary readings of “That Tree”: John Chamberlain remarked in his *New York Times* review, “One rather guesses that it was suggested by the life of Carleton Beals” (1935), and Walton surely had the story in mind when she touted Porter’s familiarity with the “American radicals, artists, and writers who haunt Mexico City.” The story was—and was read as—less an allegory about idealistic “American boys” than a commentary on the specific practices of US idealist writers in the revolutionary Latin American climate of the 1920s and 1930s.

The correspondence that Porter establishes between Beals and the protagonist of “That Tree” serves not only to highlight Porter’s experience of expatriate life in postrevolutionary Mexico but also to undercut Beals’s own position as an “authority on Latin-American revolutions.” The narrative tone toward the protagonist is negative throughout,

casting a harsh light on his lifestyle in Mexico as well as his writings on Latin America. We find out that though the protagonist is known as an “important journalist,” the reason “he had come to Mexico in the first place” was “to be a cheerful bum lying under a tree in a good climate, writing poetry” (Porter 2008, 72). His romantic views on life in Mexico are harmful to everyone around him, and his writings present a highly sentimentalized portrait of Latin American revolution to his US audience. At one point the narrator reveals that the protagonist’s “sympathies happened to fall in exactly right with the high-priced magazines of a liberal humanitarian slant which paid him well for telling the world about the oppressed peoples” (84). What the text everywhere implies but never makes explicit is that the reality of interwar Latin America appears not in the sentimental stories Beals tells the world but in the backstory we are reading about his situation in Mexico, a sort of literary equivalent to behind-the-scenes filmmaking. By staging the gap between the reality of Mexico and Beals’s portrayal of it, Porter stakes a claim to a more accurate vision of the country than that of the most famous US journalist writing about Latin America. “That Tree” thus functions both as a document of the failure of US writers like Beals to produce a literature of experience about postrevolutionary Mexico and an argument for why Porter’s own work exemplifies precisely this kind of experiential literature.

Attending to Porter’s experiential aesthetics also helps us consider her relationship to early twentieth-century Mexican literature. Recent scholarship in hemispheric studies has tended to see Porter as an exemplary model for what Rachel Adams describes as the “sustained cross-cultural pollination” (2009, 105) between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s, based on her interest in the Mexican muralist movement, Pre-Columbian art, and the revolutionary *corridos*.⁶ And indeed, in addition to writing the catalog for a major state-sponsored exhibit of Mexican art in Los Angeles in 1922, Porter claimed in “Why I Write about Mexico” that she found in the Mexican “renaissance” of the 1920s “a feeling for art consanguine with my own” (2008, 869). Yet any assumption that the previous lack of attention to Porter’s “exchange” with Mexican writers is due to critical oversight would gloss over the glaring omission of cross-cultural reading in Porter’s Mexico works. In one of her earliest essays on Mexico published in the United States, “The Mexican Trinity” (1921), Porter wrote, “Here in Mexico there is no conscience crying through the literature of the country” (895), and ten years later, in a notebook entry

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of 1931, she was even more categorical: "There is no Mexican literature. This subject is embarrassing to think about" (Porter 1930–31). Incredibly, from her arrival in 1920 until 1942, when she was commissioned by Ángel Flores to write an introduction to an English-language anthology of Latin American short stories, Porter did not mention a single twentieth-century Spanish-language Mexican poet, short story writer, or novelist in her published writings.⁷ Her claim that "Mexican literature" didn't exist effaced an entire contemporary tradition: from the novels of the revolution inaugurated by Mariano Azuela's seminal *Los de abajo* (1915) to the poetry associated with the well-known little magazine *Contemporáneos*. Writing her "own account" meant, in this context, neglecting to read the literature that Mexican writers themselves produced.

To a certain extent, Porter's elision of twentieth-century Mexican literature reflects broader cultural imbalances of the interwar period. As Helen Delpar remarks about the rising Mexican "vogue" in the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s, "Although American periodicals were dotted with verse reflecting the Mexican experiences of Americans, only a few examples of Mexican poetry were translated and published in the United States" (1992, 182).⁸ At a deeper level, however, Porter's failure to engage with the Mexican literature of the period suggests how her identity formation as a writer of experience contributed to as well as reflected this hemispheric imbalance in literary exchange. Her reviews of literature about Mexico by non-Mexican writers over the following ten years testifies less to her role as a cultural maven introducing Mexican literature to the United States than to her strategy of positioning herself as a gatekeeper of the Mexican experience, an authority she never ceased to associate with her prolonged immersion in the country. In a review of Stuart Chase's *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas*, for example, Porter writes, "There is not one shred of evidence that Mr. Chase ever set foot in this country, except for some rather sketchy glances at the scenery. Everything else, he could, and did, I believe, read from books, and most of them very silly books recently published on Mexico" (2008, 998–99). Reflecting such critical comments, her short stories frequently contain object lessons about the dangers of a writer taking her source material from books rather than experience. It hardly seems a coincidence that the US author who most ardently championed Mexican literature in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, Carleton Beals, fares so poorly in Porter's fictional rendering of him. Where the real-life Beals had reported on the

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“striking narrative form” of the “literature of the revolution” (1929, 283) in Azuela, Rafael Muñoz, and Martín Luis Guzmán, his literary avatar in “That Tree” belatedly realizes that his misconceptions about Mexico came in part from “notions about artists that [he] must have got out of books” (Porter 2008, 82). Ironically, Porter’s Mexican writings outline an argument for why US writers shouldn’t read books about Mexico. From this perspective, those writings seem to be less an anticipation of later attempts to facilitate hemispheric literary relations than one of many obstacles inhibiting the translation and incorporation of contemporary Latin American literature into the US literary field. It is perhaps for this reason that the Chilean novelist José Donoso, hoping to get a blurb from Porter for an English-language translation of one of his novels, once quipped that Porter was “under the impression that she invented Latin America” (quoted in Rostagno 1997, 53).

But if Porter’s strategies for styling herself a writer of experience in Mexico often hinged on disqualifying or undermining other expatriate writers, they must also be seen as part of her larger effort to combat the exclusionary principles with which the US modernist canon was beginning to be constructed in the interwar period. As influential critical accounts like Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle* (1931) and Cowley’s *Exile’s Return* cemented the idea that Paris and London had been the proving ground of “modern” literature for US as well as European writers, Porter continued to insist on the importance of Mexico as the scene of her own cultural formation. Even after she finally traveled to Europe in the early 1930s and began to turn to other geographies in her fiction, Porter wrote several essays that offered correctives to US and Eurocentric biases in critical accounts of the interwar period. In these postwar essays, Porter disputed both the geography and the gender—or, perhaps more precisely, the gendering of geography—of dominant narratives about US literature of the 1920s and 1930s. One of the major claims of Cowley’s 1934 edition of *Exile’s Return*, reinforced by his own biography as well as the itinerary and writings of Hemingway, was that the “common experience” of volunteer military service in Europe during the First World War had produced the structure of feeling shared by the chief American writers of the 1920s. Yet this was not the world Porter inhabited at all—having grown up in Texas, she felt a stronger connection to Mexico than to Europe; and having come of age in radical New York, she sought to distance herself from the narratives of masculine sacrifice and loss

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associated with “the Fitzgerald-Hemingway crowd in Paris” (Porter 1965). To have gone to Mexico was, in an important sense, to have avoided a specific exile and a specific exilic return. Cowley’s transatlantic account in *Exile’s Return* must have seemed particularly distorted to Porter, since she herself had acted as travel guide to Cowley during his visit to Mexico in 1930, introducing him to a very different “narrative of ideas” from the one he had imbibed in Europe.

When Porter wrote to Cowley in 1965, “I wish I had a true place in [*Exile’s Return*], but of course, I haven’t” (2012, 307), she was thus referring to “place” both literally and symbolically. Cowley’s diminution of Mexico was, in Porter’s eyes, indicative of his overall diminution of her “place” in the 1920s canon, as the one woman writer who (as he put it in revised editions) had “received as much praise or critical attention as half a dozen men of the same age” ([1934] 1994, 315). In this sense, Porter’s rejection of Cowley’s cursory mapping of her (literal) waywardness of the twenties resembled a similar critique she made of Hemingway, who had become the exemplary experiential writer in the popular imagination of the mid-twentieth-century United States. In an extraordinary essay recalling her one and only meeting with Hemingway in Sylvia Beach’s famous bookstore in Paris in 1934, Porter lampoons Hemingway’s efforts to build himself up as the supreme man of adventure, mocking how the “*beau garçon* who loved blood sports, the dark-haired sunburned muscle boy of American literature” would immediately remove his socks and shoes when entering Shakespeare and Company, “showing Sylvia the still-painful scars of his war wounds got in Italy” (2008, 676–77). Yet Porter takes this occasion not to deconstruct Hemingway’s attempts to prove he had always been in the line of fire but to play up her own experiential credentials. Midway through the essay, Porter subjects Hemingway’s ostentatious display of his battle wounds and his penchant for blood sports to a swift and definitive reversal: “It was not particularly impressive. . . . I had seen all the bullfights and done all the hunting I wanted in Mexico before I ever came to Paris” (2008, 677). Porter not only insists that she had witnessed danger in Mexico before going to Europe but also insinuates that she had found Latin America before Hemingway did—a significant claim given that Hemingway began positioning himself as a Cuba-based novelist in the mid-1930s.

Taken as a whole, Porter’s essay seems to make the simple but necessary point that the Hemingwayesque version of the literature

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of experience was itself a kind of masculine performance. Her 1955 essay "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," ostensibly about Porter's own relationship to bullfighting in Mexico in the 1920s, also offers an oblique commentary on Hemingway's notion of the "moment of truth" from his 1932 bullfighting treatise *Death in the Afternoon*. Differentiating "real experience" from "mere adventure," Porter writes, "adventure is something you seek for pleasure, or even for profit, like a gold rush or invading a country; for the illusion of being more alive than ordinarily, the thing you will to occur; but experience is what really happens to you in the long run; the truth that finally overtakes you" (2008, 808). Repurposing her earlier argument that experiential writing required prolonged immersion in a place rather than hasty impressionism, here she suggests how her definition of "real experience" contrasts with the thrill-seeking adventurism Hemingway had embodied in the 1930s. If the Hemingway essay ends with Sylvia Beach bringing the two together through a ritual of literary matchmaking—"Katherine Anne Porter . . . this is Ernest Hemingway. . . Ernest, this is Katherine Anne, and I want the two best modern American writers to know each other!" (2008, 677)—Porter leaves no doubt that the "two best modern American writers" knew very different things. Though both Porter and Hemingway were advocates of a literature of experience, they defined "experience" in markedly contrasting ways.

True testimony

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Porter attributed the failure of other writers to produce experiential literature about Mexico to numerous causes—they were too hasty, too bookish, too aggressive, too inattentive. But by the mid-1930s, she began to single out one particular problem in literary depictions of Mexico: they were too ideological. The timing of Porter's objection was not coincidental. In the United States, the onset of the Great Depression had made a deep impression on the literary field, and by the early thirties the "proletarian" novel was gaining momentum. Critics such as Wilson and Cowley joined the editors of *The New Masses* in advocating for more overtly politicized writing, pointing to Soviet realism as the most advanced current in contemporary literature. And as Michael Denning and others have shown, the formation of the Popular Front in 1934 brought an increasing number of intellectuals, activists,

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poets, playwrights, and novelists into its orbit. Yet even as many US writers began to radicalize in the early thirties, Porter became increasingly skeptical about the propagandistic uses of art. As Unrue (2005) notes, her disillusionment with the legacy of the Mexican Revolution deepened when she returned to the country for sixteen months in 1930–31, and she was discouraged by the extent to which the Depression-era cultural logic in the United States reminded her of arguments she had heard in Mexico in the 1920s. In an autobiographical fragment of 1934, she rejected the basic claim of the US literary Left (along with other leftist writers from Mexico to the Soviet Union) that art should serve an ideological function: “Politically my bent is to the Left. As for esthetic bias, my one aim is to tell a straight story and to give true testimony” (2008, 1008). Her last Mexican story, “Hacienda” (1934), can be seen as an attempt to use the aesthetics of experience to expose what she saw as the inherent danger of literature derived from ideological positioning as opposed to firsthand eyewitnessing. The target here would be a particular leftist avant-garde form associated with the practices of literary and cinematic montage.

“Hacienda” is Porter’s longest and most complex story about postrevolutionary Mexico, incorporating many of the tropes of Porter’s earlier Mexican fiction while developing new strategies of representation for the literature of experience. The event that catalyzed the story was the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein’s visit to Mexico in 1930–32 to shoot the (never-completed) film *Que Viva México!* Produced by a Hollywood group headed by Upton Sinclair, shot with a Russian film crew, and advised by artists and functionaries associated with the governing Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), the film promised to be the most international artistic work of Mexico’s postrevolutionary period. Yet Porter’s story about the filming, based on a nonfiction piece published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* about the three days she spent on set with Eisenstein and his crew in July of 1931, tells of nothing but unmitigated disaster. Though conceived as a paean to the combined victories of the Mexican and Russian Revolutions, the thinly disguised stand-in for *Que Viva México!* in Porter’s story hinges on an irony that becomes the central theme of the story. The setting for this film about social and political changes in contemporary Mexico is a colonial hacienda and pulque factory that has not changed hands since the revolution and, even worse, continues to exploit its indigenous workers. The task of Eisenstein (Uspensky in the story), as the Russian assistant puts it, is to film the present-day conditions of the hacienda *as if* they

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were the historical conditions of the Díaz era that had been entirely “swept away by the revolution.” This he says “without cracking a smile or meeting my eye” (2008, 152).

As with Porter’s earlier expatriate roman à clefs, the characters in “Hacienda” are clearly identifiable—Eisenstein becomes Uspensky, his codirector Grigory Alexandrov becomes Andreyev, the American producer Hunter Kimbrough (Sinclair’s brother-in-law) becomes Kennerly, and Porter’s erstwhile friend Adolfo Best-Maguard becomes the Mexican artist Betancourt. A fictional commentary on the contradictions of the political and social revolution in Mexico after its institutionalization in the late 1920s, Porter’s account took on particular force because the historical actors were so readily discernible. Yet Porter departs from her narrative approach in stories such as “Flowering Judas” and “That Tree” by focalizing “Hacienda” through a first-person narrator, an American woman writer clearly identified with Porter herself. If her earlier stories about Mexico frequently cast her expatriate US protagonists as object lessons in how not to write about the country, “Hacienda” offers a more positive model for how the literature of experience should be composed. In the opening paragraph, the narrator-protagonist establishes both her familiarity with Mexico’s social customs (“‘Ah, it is beautiful as a *pulman!*’ says the middle-class Mexican when he wishes truly to praise anything” [2008, 142]) and her sustained firsthand knowledge of the country’s political and cultural evolution: “Now that the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico, the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures.” Indeed, though “Hacienda” owes much to classic travel literature, since the time of the narrative overlaps entirely with the length of the narrator’s trip, the text frequently makes reference to the narrator’s prior impressions of Mexico. We are given to understand that the narrator’s prolonged immersion in the country is precisely what enables her to chronicle the gap between ideology and lived experience in the postrevolutionary period.

Although the story’s characterization of the failures of the revolution has been much discussed—the continued presence of rapacious American business interests in the country; the propagandistic drive of the Russian crew and the Mexican advisers to whitewash the still profound inequities of 1930s Mexico—Porter’s strategy for authorizing her own version of the Mexican scene *against* these agents of distortion deserves a closer look. Robert Brinkmeyer has observed that the presence of a

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faded fresco on the wall of the hacienda detailing the legend of pulque functions for the narrator as a sign of “the trivialization of Aztec myth by educated Mexicans, the transformation of a living faith into a textbook entry” (1993, 65). Yet the ossification of the living Mexico into a static representation is not performed only by the Mexicans; rather, it seems to be the goal of every character in the story *except for the narrator*. In her reviews of the 1920s, Porter had excoriated American tourists who acted like “self-appointed prophets” when they crossed the border, eager (and under contract) “to stuff it all down in a hurry and rush back with a book while the racket is still good” (2008, 997). In “Hacienda,” Kennerly assumes this role of the impetuous American traveler, announcing that he is “going to write a book about [Mexico]” (149) though he has been in the country for only a few months and lacks even the most rudimentary knowledge of Spanish. And Uspensky, whom the narrator spies “directing a scene which he was convinced could be made from no other angle” (164), operates the camera as the very mechanism of selective vision, a perpetual voyeur in a country he does not even remotely understand. Indeed, both the opportunistic American and the revolutionary Russian film crew fall into the same trap, using aesthetic expertise to promote the aims of an increasingly doctrinaire Mexican government that “wanted to improve this opportunity to film a glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution” (153). In the end, this glorious history proceeds less through intensified vision than through sins of omission. As the Russian crew and American producer travel throughout the country,

dozens of helpful [Mexican] observers, art experts, photographers, literary talents, and travel guides swarmed about them to lead them aright, and to show them all the most beautiful, significant, and characteristic things in the national life and soul: if by chance anything not beautiful got in the way of the camera, there was a very instructed and sharp-eyed committee of censors whose duty it was to see that the scandal went no further than the cutting room.

With all of these “professional propagandists” hovering around the hacienda impatient to use their medium of choice to fix a particular—and particularly narrow—version of Mexico, the only character who refuses to cut any of this disturbing footage is the narrator herself.

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The contrast between the various ideological arts of the Russians, Americans, and Mexicans and the narrator's aesthetics of experience ultimately emerges as the central narrative conflict in "Hacienda." When Kennerly remarks on the coincidence between an accidental shooting death on the premises of the hacienda and a similar scene that had been shot for the film, he marvels at the fact that "the same thing has happened to the same people in *reality*!" (171). Shortly after, he repeats the exclamation, "*Reality*!" and proceeds to "lick his chops." Over the course of Kennerly's lengthy disquisitions on the coincidence between fiction and reality—at one point, he suggests the cameraman could have simply shot the accidental death and incorporated it into the film to give the footage more authenticity—we realize that he has no qualms about subordinating the on-the-ground conditions of Mexico to the cinematic needs of the film. Indeed, for the narrator what is most significant about the film seems to be the way that several different ideological groupings—the corporatist and imperialist Hollywood perspective of Kennerly, the revolutionary triumphalism of Uspensky, and the institutional leftism of the Mexican state and its artists—have conspired to produce a narrative about contemporary Mexico that captures everything but what is *actually* happening. The text develops an elaborate parallel between the type of filmic "arrangement" such a narrative demands—preparatory photographs, cutting, and montage—with the more political and economic types of "fixing" that allow for the hacienda to remain a site of exploitation under the very noses of those who profess to be chronicling its demise:

The workers in the vat-room began to empty the fermented pulque into barrels, and to pour the fresh maguey water into the reeking bullhide vats. . . . The white flood of pulque flowed without pause; all over Mexico the Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; don Genaro and his fellow-hacendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and ambitious politicians in the capital would be stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas for themselves. It was all arranged. (175)

Not coincidentally, this political and economic "arrangement" is happening right *and* left. Uspensky/Eisenstein's technique of dialectical montage comes across as one more component of aesthetic ideology

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that elides the depressing reality of postrevolutionary Mexico. It is this reality—the “real reality”—that only the narrator perceives.

In its narrative progression as well as its treatment of character, “Hacienda” inexorably leads the reader toward the conclusion that no existing ideological system can provide an adequate foundation for an aesthetic mode of representation. Thus, while Porter diligently traces the etiology of economic exploitation, suggesting (as in the passage on *pulque* above) the systemic logic through which such exploitation takes place, the text deliberately forestalls the possibility that art can and should serve the sole purpose of transforming this system. The narrator’s greatest criticism of Eisenstein/Uspensky is that he has a “monkey attitude toward life” that “saved explanation” (161), instinctively producing images of transformation even where transformation has not occurred. It does not seem too farfetched to see in Porter’s depiction of Uspensky’s filmic style a condensation of her mistrust toward the emerging proletarian aesthetic in the United States as well: one of the accusations against Uspensky is that “American communists were paying for the film” (152), and Porter’s use of Sinclair’s brother-in-law as the model for Kennerly suggests an attempt to fully flesh out the relationship between US leftist culture and the exoticizing of Mexico that she had begun to delineate in “That Tree.” What “Hacienda” ultimately proposes, then, is not a solution to the contradictions of postrevolutionary Mexican life but an aesthetic program for exposing and understanding them. Against the backdrop of a US literary scene in which writers were increasingly advocating for revolutionary change, Porter insisted on the need for a literature of experience to portray and evaluate the changes that the revolution had (and had not) actually brought about.

From cult of experience to experience of the text

In 1940, Philip Rahv published his influential essay “The Cult of Experience in American Writing” in *The Partisan Review*. The essay, which provides the fullest contemporary treatment of what I refer to here as the US literature of experience, argues that the “modern movement in American writing” had been characterized by a vast creative endeavor that “found the terms and objects of its activity in the urge toward and immersion in experience” (1940, 413). Though it was Hemingway rather than Porter who exemplified the contemporary US “cult of experience” for Rahv, his conclusions about the development of the

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discourse of experience appear to reflect an awareness of the strategies of representation Porter had employed in works like "Hacienda." As critical as Rahv had been of the "intense predilection for the real" in novelists such as Hemingway, he also believed that the "primacy of experience in late American literature . . . conferred certain benefits upon it, of which none is more bracing than its relative immunity from abstraction and otherworldliness. The stream of life, unimpeded by the rocks and sands of ideology, flows through it freely" (421). In the midst of a European war in which all strong ideologies were increasingly viewed as suspect, Rahv posits that the "modern" writers of experience in the United States had avoided them. Here Rahv might very well have drawn on Porter's response to a *Partisan Review* questionnaire the previous year; there she claimed that her "whole attempt has been . . . to make a distillation of what human relations and experiences my mind has been able to absorb," and she added that as the "political tendency since 1930 has been to the last degree a confused, struggling, drowning-man-and-straw sort of thing. . . . I hope we shall have balance enough to see ourselves plainly" (2008, 706). In this sense Rahv was not unlike Cowley, partially incorporating Porter's aesthetics of experience without explicitly recognizing its centrality to the literary trends he was describing.

Yet while Porter and her vision of experiential literature did have a significant effect on the mid-century US literary field, tracing that effect requires a somewhat circuitous route. As McGurl suggests, the US postwar university and its rapidly replicating creative writing programs became the laboratory for much of post-1945 fiction, as well as the official workshop for "writing what you know." Although McGurl highlights the prominence of Hemingway's statements on the writing process in the development of the creative writing program, Porter's incorporation into the postwar US institutions of higher education was equally dramatic. This was not primarily because she taught creative writing (though she did) but because her literary aesthetic was treated with growing admiration, both in the academic classroom and the creative writing workshop. Beginning in the 1920s, Porter befriended several writers associated with the Southern Renaissance—Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks—who later formed the core of the New Critical movement that swept through academia in the 1940s and 1950s. Tate and Brooks both wrote essays celebrating Porter's work, and Warren's seminal article, "Katherine Anne Porter: Irony with a Center" (1942) opens with the assertion that Porter "belongs to that relatively small group of writers . . .

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who have done serious, consistent, original, and vital work in the form of short fiction—the group which would include James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and Kay Boyle” ([1942] 1997, 53). By the early 1950s, Porter’s work had so thoroughly permeated the American university that, as McCarthy’s narrator in *Groves of Academe* playfully put it, the advocates of modern poetry made it their mission to displace those writers who were identified by their “flaccid, prosy devotions to K. A. P., Hemingway, Lardner, [and] Saroyan” ([1951] 1985, 220).

Porter’s more visible incorporation into the universities and the early postwar literary canon, however, masked a more subtle way in which her work was institutionalized by the New Critics: by corralling her notion of writing from immersive experience into the confines of the text itself. Although the antihistorical, antibiographical bent of the New Criticism and its analytical methods have been much documented, the relationship between the New Criticism and the “cult of experience” has rarely, if ever, been explored. At times, New Critical analysis would take a normative stance toward the writer of experience, as in Brooks and Warren’s assessment of Hemingway’s stories: “The figures which live in this world, live a sort of hand-to-mouth existence perceptually, and conceptually, they hardly live at all. Subordination implies some exercise of discrimination—the sifting of reality through the intellect. But Hemingway has a romantic anti-intellectualism which is to be associated with the premium which he places upon experience as such” (quoted in Rahv 1949, 10). Yet if the experiential bent in the works of Porter and Hemingway was problematic in certain respects for Brooks and Warren, their writerly creed of “giv[ing] true testimony” as a means of debunking ideological literature appealed enormously to the New Critics, who were steadily moving toward a separation of literature from politics in the 1930s and early 1940s (Wilford 1995).

Warren’s analysis of “Flowering Judas” in “Katherine Anne Porter: Irony with a Center” sheds light on how Porter’s experiential aesthetics was recast by the New Critics as exemplary modernist style, that is, how the emphasis on personal experience in Porter’s writings was transformed into a question of purely literary technique. In Warren’s reading, “Flowering Judas” becomes an exercise in verbal irony rather than a commentary on the lived irony of the postrevolutionary period in Mexico. “We have here a tissue of contradictions,” he writes about the

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text's treatment of the "skilled revolutionist" Braggioni, "and the very phraseology takes us to these contradictions. For instance, the word *yearns* involves the sentimental, blurred emotion, but immediately afterward, the words *sideways* and *oily* remind us of the grossness, the brutality, the physical appetite" ([1942] 1997, 56). In passage after passage, the revolutionary's betrayal of the cause is framed in the language of "irony," "paradox," "contradiction," and "ambiguity," terms that would become central to the New Critical vocabulary. Although Warren's essay tracks Porter's critique of ideology in stories like "Hacienda" and "Flowering Judas" fairly closely, he locates her exploration of ideological betrayal exclusively at the textual level. In other words, he identifies as verbal irony what appears in Porter's work as a kind of situational (or even situated) irony, the irony of a revolutionary process whose outcome ran exactly counter to what we (and she) might have expected. And in fact, in Brooks and Warren's New Critical textbook *Understanding Fiction* (1943), this more limited sense of textual irony becomes the starting point for literary analysis. In their introductory "Letter to the Teacher," Brooks and Warren define *irony* as a "conflict" that "concerns the alignment of judgments and sympathies on the part of the author" (1943, xvii), a formal quality that distinguishes good fiction from works that indulge in "merely dogmatic and partisan vilification" (xviii). Porter insisted that the key to critiquing ideology was experiential immersion; the New Critics who read her work transferred the "inherent contradictions" of the political, social, and personal from her experience to the text itself. Although Porter herself stressed that her exposure in Mexico to the "real persons and events" behind "Flowering Judas" was essential to its genesis and meaning, Warren's essay on Porter suggests that the textual rendering of "incident and implication" ([1942] 1997, 62) is all one needs to understand the contradictions about revolutionary dogma the story portrays. An intelligent critic, in other words, can get the meaning without having had the experience.

Warren's New Critical interpretation of Porter's work demonstrates in miniature a critical operation I would call the "disciplining" of the US literature of experience. When one reads the essays, textbooks, and articles by New Critics such as Warren, Brooks, and Tate in the 1930s and 1940s, one encounters not only prohibitions on what William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley would later dub the "intentional fallacy" (1946) of linking an author's intent to the meaning of a text but also, and perhaps

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more insistently, an assault on the idea that the scope, place, or intensity of a writer's personal experience should determine one's reading of a literary text. This critical agenda obscured the specific forms and techniques that Porter used to produce her Mexico fiction—the expatriate roman à clef, the situated ideological critique, and the satirical portrait of the bookish/sentimental American author—all of which were taken up and adapted by later US writers of international fiction. Equally significantly, it contributed to a more general tendency in Americanist literary criticism to define US modernist writers primarily by their textual style (Hemingway's "minimalism," Porter's "irony," etc.) rather than their authorial trajectories.

As the New Criticism became the dominant scholarly trend in postwar academia, the split between literary critics and fiction writers would increasingly be defined in terms of their respective stances on the correlation between authorial experience and creative writing. This split became ever more pronounced in Porter criticism. At one pole was Warren, who, though himself a novelist as well as a critic, inaugurated a formal/symbolist mode for interpreting Porter's stories and short novels. At the other pole were those like Eudora Welty, whose commemorative essay on Porter, "The Eye of the Story" (1968), proposes a writerly experience-based interpretation of Porter's work in opposition to the New Critical paradigm. For Welty, it was less Porter's form than her experiential trajectory—her relentless quest to seek out the cultural equivalent of "the eye of the storm"—that motivated her fiction: "[Her] stories of Mexico, Germany, Texas all happen there: where love and hate, trust and betrayal happen" ([1968] 1986, 44). It is significant that Welty, typically recognized for her defense of regionalism, here validates Porter's ability to immerse herself in non-US as well as US locales. Welty's assessment chimes, in an important way, with Porter's own *ars poetica*, which assumed the high modernist commonplace of technical virtuosity—"spen[ding] a great while secretly and with great absorption trying to master a craft" (2008, 703)—yet simultaneously insisted that "foreign travel and experience are good for everybody. . . . But for writers they are an invaluable, irreplaceable education in life" (709).

It was in the context of these interpretive skirmishes between US writers of experience and New Critical academics, I would argue, that McGurl's story about the "sneering war between creative writers and scholars in the university" (2009, 8) truly commenced. It was a war, I might add, that was waged in literal and conceptual territories that

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extended far beyond the campus. Where was the authority of literature located? Was it in the author's life experience, in the places, events, and peoples with which she has come into contact? Was it in the transmutation of these experiences into art? Or was it always already inside the text, subject to the extracting devices of the best tools of interpretation? Was "foreign experience" an "irreplaceable education," or could one find the source of literature in the domestic scene? Though these dilemmas about the role of experience in literary production eventually shaded into discussions about more localized forms of race, gender, and class formation associated with the rise of identity politics and literary multiculturalism, they continued to undergird many of the major debates in the post-1945 US literary field. And although Porter's influence in this debate would eventually fade, her stories remain a powerful testament to the literary and critical legacy of the US literature of experience.

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Notes

1. In the original 1923 contributor's note, Porter added the clarification, "And, to my mind, this includes Mexico" ("Why" 1923), though she eliminated the line in the 1952 reprinting. The 1923 version leaves no doubt that one of the principle goals of the piece was to redefine "America" to include the hemisphere's non-English-speaking places and inhabitants.
2. Porter's relationship to the political intrigue surrounding the assassination attempt was first revealed in Thomas Walsh's *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden* (1992, 35-39).
3. For a fuller discussion of the concept of the "US literature of experience," see Lawrence 2014.
4. My use of the terms *US writers* and *US literary field* follows Caren Irr's recent suggestion that the most important factor in determining what counts as "US fiction" is not the "writer's birthplace, citizenship, current residence, or workplace" but "an explicit effort to address a North American audience" (2014, 11). This more inductive definition is particularly helpful

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in the US-Mexican context, where questions of language as well as of the national origin have mediated (and continue to mediate) what is considered “American” or “Mexican” fiction.

5. See Delpar 1992, Britton 1995, and Adams 2009. Claudio Lomnitz’s *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (2014) analyzes the prehistory of the Mexican Revolution in the work of transnational actors such as Turner and the Flores Magón brothers, suggesting that many of the intellectual and cultural currents that precipitated the revolution were far more bilateral than previously acknowledged.

6. On Porter’s relationship to Mexican art and culture, see in particular Unrue (1985) 2009 and 2005, Walsh 1992, Brinkmeyer 1993, Alvarez 1997, Limón 1998, and Adams 2009.

7. The only references to twentieth-century Spanish-language Mexican writers I have been able to locate in Porter’s unpublished writings of the 1920s and 1930s are brief mentions of Amado Nervo, Salvador Novo, and Martín Luis Guzmán. It is true that Porter wrote essays on the nineteenth-century soldier-novelist José Jouín Fernández de Lizardi and the colonial poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and published translations of their work in her name. Yet Walsh has shown through epistolary evidence that the translation of Lizardi’s *El periquillo sarmiento*, published as *The Itching Parrot* in 1942, was in fact the work of Porter’s then husband Eugene Pressly (see Walsh 1992, 196–97). And a note Porter sent to Francisco Aguilera in 1923 suggests that, at least at that time, her Spanish was not good enough to translate Spanish-language texts without significant assistance.

8. Delpar further states that only two Mexican novelists were translated into English: Azuela and Guzmán.

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Historical Violence and Modernist Forms in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*

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This essay places Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) into dialogue with Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), in order to explore the problem of how fiction engages historical silence. My largest claim is that Wicomb's novel enacts a mode of historical knowledge that cannot be properly narrativized; it attends to echoes, inchoate correspondences, and the historically unsaid, in an effort to recover the occluded stories of the oppressed and the traumatized. In the context of the novel, these stories have primarily to do with the "coloured" woman's unacknowledged place in the antiapartheid struggle.¹ That story remains unspoken because it troubles the masculine narrative of heroic resistance to apartheid—indeed, it exposes the patriarchal violence that links the African National Congress (ANC) to the racist structures it opposes. To effect the recovery of these silenced voices, the novel develops modernist forms that trouble what Benjamin calls the "storm of progress," recollecting and preserving (without newly reifying) the stories of those who are not history's "victors" (Benjamin 1969, 258, 254).²

My discussion of these matters has three main parts. First, I place the novel in the context of current criticism with special attention to discussions of its formal and historiographical ambitions. I contend that the novel is modernist in a way that critics have largely missed: it engages in the Baudelairean project of combining "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" with "the eternal and the immutable" (Baudelaire 1995, 13). Second, I analyze the book's internal, explicit engagements with modernists James Joyce and Joseph Conrad. Using the understanding of modernism (and its political implications) developed therein as my base, I develop the figure of the constellation in Benjamin's "Theses" to explicate the form of the novel and its contribution to this modernist imaginary.

Finally, my essay turns to the questions of representation surrounding the figure of Dulcie Oliphant and her relationship to David Dirkse, to whom the narrative officially “belongs.” These questions of representation are at the heart of the narrative. The unnamed narrator searches for a method of representing history that does justice to Dulcie’s experience of violence at the hands of comrades while also refusing to reinscribe her fully into discourse—an act that the book conceives as a reprisal of the violence wreaked upon her body. Dulcie becomes (in the narrator’s hands) less an object of representation than a subject whose irreducible, unrepresentable singularity disrupts traditional techniques of totalizing (linear, progressivist) narrative. I read Dulcie’s resistance to narrative through Benjamin’s essay to develop the idea of a constellational history that reveals her fragmentation by history while mapping that experience in relation to other women in different historical moments. This constellational interpretation shows how the novel is less “David’s” than “David and Dulcie’s” story—a story in which Dulcie “erupts” but remains unpositivized, and one that constellates her with a host of other disremembered women whose voices have been shut out by narratives of heroic, masculine resistance.

David’s Story, Zoë Wicomb’s first novel following her short story collection *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), is expressly concerned with the questions of nationhood and the writer’s role in resistance. Educated in South Africa and Scotland, Wicomb in her short stories and novels focuses on South African identity (specifically mixed race), gender, and the effects of the apartheid/antiapartheid struggles. In various interviews and essays, Wicomb has previously examined and questioned what literature or history can actually do, but it is *David’s Story*, to me, that most compellingly explores this idea of art in action, especially in a politically dire time. By putting David, a member of the antiapartheid ANC, together with the unnamed, college-educated amanuensis, the novel interrogates political responsibility, the capacity of storytelling to *do*, and storytelling’s value to national identity/politics. The story that David wants is a family history, or a genealogy. The story that the narrator wants is Dulcie’s, the mysterious woman who haunts David and his story.

David’s Story explores the difficulties inherent in constructing histories of resistance and of resistance fighters. The novel considers how narratives of the fight against apartheid often elide experiences of coloured women who were central to that resistance. Their stories are irreconcilable with

the dominant narrative of heroic male resistance and, as a result, have been overwritten by it. The novel tells the story of David, the titular character and a member of the ANC, and his family history, while at the same time containing the story of Dulcie, a female member of ANC. David continually displaces, distorts, and traduces Dulcie's story because he cannot come to terms with the reality of her experience in Camp Quatro, a prison camp in Angola that the ANC opened to "house those ANC members who had either violated the organization's regulations or were accused of being infiltrators in the service of the apartheid regime" (Cleveland 2005, 65).³ The unnamed narrator, hired by David to write his story, wants to legitimize Dulcie's experience in the face of historical forces intent on eradicating it. However, the narrator's inability to assimilate Dulcie's story into David's without rendering the latter a radically *other* story—a story no longer "about" David at all—transforms Dulcie into a ghost that haunts the text, frustrating David's effort at coherent, heroic narration.

Recent criticism of *David's Story* focuses on the material feminine body and its relation to memory and trauma. In "On Women, Bodies, and Nation: Feminist Critique and Revision in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*," for example, Christa Baiada views Dulcie as willingly surrendering her body to the ANC and subsequently becoming a receptacle for injury. Because of Dulcie's willingness to sacrifice, she "bears the physical evidence of the psychic wounds of the nation" (Baiada 2008, 37–38). Dulcie, then, is a representation of the resistance movement's relationship to the coloured female body; her scars come to signal the suffering of the multitude rather than being irreducibly her own. Baiada's view is that this subordination of coloured women's subjectivities to the requirements of the new nation is one effect of the way their stories do not fit the dominant story of resistance. She draws a connection between Dulcie's experience and that of Rachel Susanna (wife of Andrew le Fleur, chief of the Griquas) and Sally (David's wife): Rachel Susanna "becomes trapped by her growing body," and Sally "gives her body, both sexual object and solidier, to the Movement within the minimal choices allowed her" (Baiada 2008, 40, 39). These experiences require a repression of the personal for the benefit of the national. Both Sally and Rachel Susanna are outspoken women who actively question power structures, usually through interrogations of their respective husbands. In Rachel Susanna's questioning of Andrew Le Fleur's advocacy for apartheid, for example,

she undermines his masculinity (upon which his power as a husband and leader rests), and that cannot be tolerated. Since coloured women's subjectivities pose a threat to the dominant narrative of the ANC, the resistance, ultimately, requires their erasure and narrative silence.

Minesh Dass (2011) addresses a similar historical silencing, or erasure of the self, in his discussion of *steatopygia* and *amanuensis*. His argument has two parts, each of which centers on language as an oppressive, silencing mechanism. First, the gendering of *steatopygia* (what the racist imaginary conceives as "excess fat deposits") and *amanuensis* (one who transcribes or ghostwrites) reduces the experience of South African coloured women to either their excessive flesh and/or the act of copying out words spoken by men. These two words perform a specific, sociohistorical kind of silence, where they become "the meta-narrative for all stories that cannot be told" in the novel (Dass 2011, 53). Though he addresses the criticisms from Marxists that poststructuralism is irredeemably ahistorical, Dass moves away from the analysis of *steatopygia* and *amanuensis* as rooted in South African history and uses them as examples of language's intrinsic (nonhistorical) inadequacy. The "meta-narratives" encoded in *steatopygia* and *amanuensis* become instances of an "inherent instability" (58) in language that prevents us from separating truth (history) and fiction. Dass concludes that *David's Story* makes us consider history as bound by "the (enabling) limits and the complexities of all narrativisation" because history, at its base, is language and, thus, can only flaunt the failure of reference, the impossibility of grounding words in the extralinguistic real. While Dass may be right about language's intrinsic groundlessness, I am arguing that it is a historically specific silencing that confronts the narrator of *David's Story*.⁴ The narrator must fight David, and the ANC, at every turn to tell even fragments of Dulcie's story. She refuses to conflate the silencing of Dulcie with the silence or absence at the heart of all language because to do so risks capitulating to the very political system that tortured Dulcie in the first place.⁵

Stephen Morton's reading of the novel pushes beyond Baiada and Dass to suggest that, while the story of Dulcie's part in the resistance is inassimilable to "a masculine narrative of anti-colonial struggle," she remains equally resistant to conventional modes of feminist "recovery" (2010, 502). She exists in a liminal space that makes her elusive and resistant to representation. Dulcie, he writes, "draws attention to the impossibility of recovering subaltern histories." Morton considers this

“impossibility” to be the driving force of Wicomb’s novel, suggesting that Dulcie’s resistance to linear narration follows from the fact that neither David nor the narrator has a language for her: “Neither the masculine discourse of militarism nor the liberal discourse of feminism can account for Dulcie” (501). But Dulcie’s traumatization at the hands of her ANC comrades, while partially responsible for her unrepresentability, has not destroyed her subjectivity entirely. She continually punctures and disrupts the narrative in the novel, much to David’s dismay.

My claim is that this puncturing (by Dulcie’s “story”) of the story that David wants the narrator to transcribe produces a formal experiment that current scholarship has not yet adequately described or accounted for. Derek Attridge’s essay on Wicomb (a South African novelist from the postapartheid era, she shares a place of origin with Attridge) goes some distance in the direction I’m proposing. Attridge explores the relationship between David’s complex “racial” genealogy and the crisis of historical transition to democracy in South Africa, a relationship that leads Attridge to align Wicomb’s novel with the modernist mode. It is “from the modernist tradition that [*David’s Story*] derives most of the technical resources it exploits,” he writes (2005, 160). The modernist “resources” referenced sought to understand and contain incredible historical change, what David Harvey calls “an explosive capitalist condition” (1990, 115). Like the modernists in the early twentieth century, Wicomb’s modernism is also grappling with historical insecurity: the formation of a new South Africa. Attridge links Wicomb to modernism, however, by suggesting a similarity between *David’s Story* and Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Both of these texts are (in his view) the “direct product of the ambiguities and conflicts of the historical time and place” (2005, 161), by which he implies that the transition to democracy in South Africa reprises the transition to capitalist modernity in early twentieth-century Europe. Leaving aside the viability of this parallel, Attridge here appears to conflate modernist with postmodernist modes of storytelling, invoking the modernist revolution of the word but turning to the *postmodern* Pynchon as his example.

My argument that reading *David’s Story* as a modernist text is revelatory entails interpreting it through and against the modernist intertexts that Wicomb herself selects. While Attridge believes that the novel’s modernism comes from the historical parallels between contemporary South Africa and twentieth-century Europe (2005, 161),

I argue that the novel's modernist project lies in the self-conscious exploration and interrogation of different modernist forms. To account for lost subjectivities, the novel develops a series of echoing, historically but not linearly related "stories" that aim to accommodate the irreducibility of the historically occluded to the hegemony of linear form. Wicomb's conception of an expressly modernist nonlinearity is, as we will see, related to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Both aim to recover, without integrating, the historically occluded or silenced. Instead of linearity, *David's Story* offers interrelated and codependent stories that preserve subjectivities across generations rather than allowing them to be destroyed by self-sacrifice and absorbed into the triumphal present. While Dass argues that words, in all their inadequacies, doom attempts at historical reclamation to a certain kind of failure, I argue that the narrative rejects this poststructuralist notion. To accept that Dulcie's story is historically irrecoverable means submitting to the historical forces that wish to silence David and the narrator, and, in doing so, to erase Dulcie.

David's Story as a modernist text

The novel begins, "This is and is not David's story" (DS 1). David, a comrade in the military wing of the ANC, hires the unnamed narrator to transcribe his story, which will be grounded in or legitimized by a family history, a genealogy. Dulcie, also a member in the MK,⁶ is fundamental to the story David wants the narrator to construct. However, he continually avoids and displaces Dulcie's experience, requiring the amanuensis to narrativize Dulcie's life with little to no evidence. David's reticence to discuss anything other than his genealogy and the narrator's commitment to Dulcie (and many other women that come up in the course of David's story) form the central conflict of the novel. On the one hand, the narrative is about the interrogation of the limitations and paradoxes of storytelling, while at the same time it is dedicated to telling the stories of the women in David's life. The narrator and David continually argue about the nature of the story they are constructing and its viability, with David refusing to allow Dulcie's representation at all and the narrator taking steps toward a representation that minimizes further violence. The consensus, or resolution they come to, is the novel itself: a meditation on the contradictions inherent in the construction of histories and representation of experience. And yet these meditations do not lead to

the political paralysis of postmodernism (more on that later). Instead, they invoke a modernist legacy.

Though the intensely self-reflexive elements of *David's Story* appear to make it a postmodern work, Wicomb chooses foundational modernist texts as her frames. Attridge argues that Wicomb “convey[s] most forcefully the new uncertainties we associate with the early twentieth-century innovations of modernism and their long heritage” (2005, 160). Wicomb invokes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) to place her novel in relation to that long heritage. These works of course predate World War II, the aftermath of which sees the rise of postcolonial and postmodern literatures. Attridge's reading is based on an intuited analogy between two historical moments of “instability and confusion”: Europe following World War II and South Africa during the “period of transition from apartheid to democracy” (2005, 161). *Modern* becomes a blanket term that covers a considerable amount of time without taking into consideration the historical specificity (temporal locations, subjectivities, and aesthetic practices or choices) of both Wicomb's text and those that she draws on or echoes in her narrative. Nonetheless, the concept of *David's Story* being a modernist project is compelling and Attridge draws it into focus. In my own argument, I shift to consider the novel's explicit engagement with high modernist texts and figures of the pre-World War II era.

Wicomb establishes her link to this lineage partly by way of allusion. In one direct reference to Joyce, for example, she has David and Dulcie meet for the first time on Bloomsday, the day on which Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place.⁷ The narrator makes the connection explicit: “Youth Day—Soweto Day, the sixteenth of June—that's also Joyce's Bloomsday, I gabble excitedly, Day of the Revolution of the Word. Imagine, black children revolting against Afrikaans, the language of the oppressors” (DS 35).⁸ The associations establish a relationship between the linguistic revolution signaled by Joyce's novel and the social revolution of Soweto Day. David reacts negatively to this constellation and attempts to move the discussion elsewhere. The narrator persists, however, and asks, “But wasn't that the day you met Dulcie, in the Soweto Day celebrations?” Though David evades the question, the narrator's invocation of Dulcie is irrevocable. The narrator senses her presence, “a protean subject that slithers hither and thither, out of reach, repeating, replacing, transforming itself.” Dulcie's manifestation here sounds remarkably like language

and, in particular, like language as that slippery, productively unstable medium first self-consciously explored by the writers we've come to call "modernist." Theirs is a language that refuses full presence yet gestures toward an external world that the procedures of language place "out of reach." In conjunction with the reference to Joyce, then, we might say that Wicomb establishes a genealogy linking the modernist revolution of the word, the political resistance to apartheid (Soweto), and the elusively disruptive reality of Dulcie (i.e., of coloured women) as that which antiapartheid historiography cannot quite expunge or absorb.

A rather different instance of the novel's engagement with modernism occurs when David discovers his name on a hit list. Here the issue is less the linguistic revolutions of modernism than a set of thematic preoccupations that were central to modernism's engagement with the colonial.⁹ David's panicked thoughts as he reads his name on the list allude to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* while performing a reversal of that book's gender codings—a reversal that profoundly disturbs him: "Now he, David, is the intended. Like a girl in the twilight time of waiting to be claimed as wife, a time of gazing at the world through windows that are columns of light; a girl clutching at straws, at the fading light, waiting to be told the truth. Or, he shakes his head in disbelief, the horror" (DS 113). The reference to "the intended" and "the horror" establishes the thematic connection between *Heart of Darkness* and *David's Story* in their explorations of the other. More specifically, both texts explore what it takes to *imagine* the other and, in imagining, to empathize and identify with the oppressed. David's name, exposed on a hit list evokes Kurtz's fiancée, who is only ever called "My Intended," and puts him in the fantasmatic position of woman (Conrad 2003, 115). Occupying the position of the female other emasculates and horrifies David and also sets him apart from Kurtz, whose own horror was racial rather than gendered. As the intended, his masculinity has been negated, and he is "a girl clutching at straws" (DS 113). To be the intentional object of power is here to be at once feminine and targeted for death. David's reaction navigates the connection between race and gender in the texts of modernists, and Wicomb's own reworking of that intersectionality. David himself understands his name on the hit list through the lens of Conradian horror, in a way that suggests this modernist trope has infected his subjectivity. Wicomb, meanwhile, through her depiction of David, demonstrates the value of modernist texts to reveal the complexity of

South African subjectivities that are living the “horror” of apartheid, but also those who are resisting that horror and striving to make the revolution.

The importance of the text's associations with modernist writers such as Joyce and Conrad stems from Wicomb's confidence in the power of language to grasp the real, and possibly to change it. For the major difference between a modernist and a postmodernist aesthetic resides in a shift toward radical groundlessness. It lies, as Harvey has argued, in postmodernism's exclusive allegiance to “the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the chaotic side of Baudelaire's formulation” (1990, 116). By eschewing the other half of Baudelaire's definition of modern (“the eternal and immutable”), postmodernism moves “beyond the point where any coherent politics are left” and “avoids confronting the realities of political economy and the circumstances of global power” (116, 117). Postmodernism's skepticism and emphasis on the limitations of language to articulate the historical ground of the present enforce our entrapment in language rather than foster a sense of the linguistic as a domain of productive agency. I agree with Harvey that while postmodernism “opens up a radical prospect by acknowledging the authenticity of other voices,” its perpetual “deconstructing and delegitimizing” then “disempowers those voices (of women, ethnic and racial minorities, colonized peoples, the unemployed, youth, etc.).”

Modernism, while still attending to the ephemerality of social life, is “preoccupied with language, with finding some special mode of representation of eternal truths” (20). Artists of the modernist project (Harvey uses Joyce, Proust, and Pollock as examples) “showed a tremendous preoccupation with the creation of new codes, significations, and metaphorical allusions in the languages they constructed. But if the word was indeed fleeting, ephemeral, and chaotic, then the artist had, for that very reason, to represent the eternal through an instantaneous effect, making ‘shock tactics and the violation of expected continuities’ vital to the hammering home of the message that the artist sought to convey” (21). Harvey's language here is indicative of a particular kind of violence in modernism that postmodernism brings to light and interrogates—rightly so. But it is a critique that lacks any real solution other than constant attenuation.

Wicomb does not completely ignore the ways in which language can oppress, imprison, or otherwise damage: the novel understands how

careful it must be in order not to “crush Dulcie with facts” (DS 78). This clearly means the danger of burying her under a linguistic accumulation of biographical detail. One danger posed by language is thus that of a crushing, conventionally fact-based or positivistic storytelling. The second concerns a danger inhering in the poststructuralist view of language. The narrator at one point returns home to find that someone has broken in to her house, erased her draft of David’s story, and written the following words on her computer screen: “*This text deletes itself*” (212). The words have clearly been left by agents of the historical forces that want to silence Dulcie. Hence a self-canceling, deconstructive view of language is placed on the side of those who wish to expunge experiences that threaten dominative power structures. There is a paralytic element to the threat: if text is self-deleting, and if all we have is text, what happens to the (extratextual) subject of political agency or change? The emphasis on the revolution of the word suggests the novel’s dedication to the idea that language can and should be politically mobilizing and enabling. *David’s Story*, then, enacts its own revolution of language to fashion a structure in which Dulcie can be protected from traditional, heroic forms of historiography and remembered in an ethical way.

Notes toward an alternative historiography

Like Wicomb’s novel, Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940) is formally fragmented in ways designed to resist a linear, causal progression. Benjamin, as a Marxist critic, contends that to understand history linearly is to understand history as written by the victors. The dominant narrative is constitutively incomplete, lacking the stories of the oppressed.¹⁰ Reading *David’s Story* through Benjamin reveals the difficulty of constructing alternate histories: the dominant narrative is ever present and ever oppressive. Benjamin illustrates this threat in his analysis of Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus,” in which history is a vast, continuous destruction, “a storm” that “we call progress” (1969, 258). As an alternative to this “wreckage,” Benjamin posits a model of history that has the capacity to accommodate the stories of the oppressed without merely “recovering” the subaltern as subjects of a new yet still linear history. Wicomb’s novel performs a similar retrieval of history, resisting linear narrative in order to bring Dulcie’s ghost into the light of speech without integrating her into a totalizing story.

Wicomb's novel shares with Benjamin's essay a commitment to developing alternative modes of historical narration. The narrator's insistence that she must "invent a structure" (DS 199) in order to tell the story she's been charged with alludes to the inadequacy of present forms, a problem to which Benjamin was attuned in his own historical moment: fascist Europe recently devastated by World War I and entering World War II. My suggestion for mapping the novel's form, or articulating its inner structure, is to develop Benjamin's metaphor of the constellation: "A historian who takes this [Benjamin's version of historical materialism] as his point of departure stops telling the sequences of events like beads on a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation, which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (1969, 263). What puts this conceptualization of history at odds with linear narrative is the absence of causal relationships. To constitute events as related to each other across space and time, rather than proposing that one event caused another, is to question the relationship between past and present. It enables a revaluation of our proximity to the past as well as an interrogation of accepted narratives. Wicomb's novel enacts precisely this kind of revaluation as it engages both formal and temporal facets of history-as-constellation.

The narrator, as fictive historian, conceives of David's story as a constellation rather than a family tree, conferring upon his story modernist (Benjaminian) possibilities for recovery of lost stories or lost time. She rejects the trope of linear history through genealogy and instead compiles a collection of stories that speak to a common experience shared by South African women: Beeswater 1922, Cape Town 1991, Kokstad 1917, and a condensed overview of the eighteenth century to cover the origins of the Griquas. The narrator does not linearly arrange the events, and they are not causally related, yet their proximity suggests an interconnectedness. In fact, in following Benjamin's thought that the historian must "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," the moments mirror each other in "constellating" patterns that pose a threat to historicist understanding (1969, 255). As an example, after the narrator wrestles with being an amanuensis, what she calls "a weight that I cannot carry" (DS 151), the narrative segues into a section set in Beeswater, 1922. The shift from the narrator's present to the past draws a connection between her and Antjie, Andrew Le Fleur's lover, and Rachael Susanna Kok, Andrew's wife. They are both biologically related to David—Abraham Le Fleur is his great-grandfather and chief of the

Griquas—but the juxtaposition between the narrator's lamentation and the stories of these two women ties them all together through the weight carried by women. Le Fleur thus designates Antjie a "Rain Sister"; this makes her responsible "for collecting and carrying back radical moisture" from the Cape to Namaqualand, where the Griquas lived (153). Antjie thinks that being a Rain Sister is a "burden disguised as an honor" which "weigh[s] heavily on her heart" (155). Antjie's burden metamorphoses from water to a child. Through the "many indications that the Chief cared too much for Antjie" the text suggests that her baby, Ragel, David's grandmother, was fathered by Abraham Le Fleur (158). Bearing a child and bearing water represent material weights that are echoed symbolically in the weights carried by the narrator and Rachael Susanna.

Antjie's duty as a water bearer is akin to Rachael Susanna's duty as amanuensis, to write down what Andrew says obediently and without question. When she does question, Andrew says to Rachael Susanna, "Dorie, you had better think of your duty, woman" (160). The weight for Rachael Susanna takes a less literal form: just as the narrator endures the weight of the story, Rachael Susanna bears the burden of Andrew's words. Duty and femininity are in close proximity here, bringing us back to the woman who began the chain of associations: the narrator, whose duty it is to transcribe not only David's story but women's stories as well. In her transcription, she bears the weight of history. Dass argues that what connects these women is pain, but he overlooks their shared relationship to story and history. By constellating their stories, the narrator once again shows David's model of (linear, genealogical) understanding to be inadequate while constructing a feminine, nonlinear history that also includes Dulcie's story of torture.

Dulcie's torture, as depicted on the page, is not just about the "lover torturers" who visit her in the night but also about the trauma associated with the construction of narratives, especially ones full of violence (Driver 2000, 240). Dulcie is in the military wing of the ANC, like David, and the narrator thinks she might be a commander. Despite her high rank, Dulcie is tortured. From what the narrative tells us about Dulcie, it becomes apparent that the only violation of ANC regulation might have been her strength: "They do not understand that for a woman like her—who has turned her muscles into ropes of steel, who will never be driven into subordination, who even as an eager girl in the bush wars resisted the advances of those in power, resisted her own comrades . . . who has known since childhood that tyranny must be overthrown—for a woman like her

there is no submission" (DS 179). Dulcie refuses to succumb to the ANC's silencing project in a way that David both cannot and will not: though he himself is tortured, he still identifies with the mission of the ANC and wants a narrative that rationalizes the torture and the suffering. By making torture an acceptable part of the ANC's heroic mission, David won't have to confront the violence or his part in it. His complicity emerges from the gendered nature of the violence. Dulcie's strength and resistance, her femininity, threatens the ANC's control, and she must be silenced.

The novel walks a fine line in the sequences where Dulcie is being tortured because of its concern with preserving Dulcie and not inflicting further trauma on her. The prose hints at torture, at once refers to and circles around it, as in this instance of second-person narration: "Then you can run through the vocabulary of recipe books, that which is done to food, to flesh—tenderize, baste, sear, seal, sizzle, score, chop" or when one of Dulcie's tormentors says, "Not rape, that will teach her nothing, leave nothing; rape's too good for her kind, waving the electrodes as another took off her nightclothes" (178). By providing "the vocabulary of recipe books," the narrator at once avoids and suggests Dulcie's experience at the hands of the torturers. The "you" requires the reader to make the connections and the assumptions because the text cannot ethically spell them out. It becomes our job to understand and seek out the vocabulary marked on Dulcie's body. From the list, we also understand the objectification of Dulcie's body on the part of the torturers. No longer a woman, she becomes "food" and "flesh" or meat. Aware of her responsibility to Dulcie, the narrator questions the narrative impulse and wonders about how to preserve Dulcie from more suffering.

By agreeing to tell this story, Dulcie's story, the narrator is implicated in and cannot be excluded from Dulcie's suffering. This complicity in (discursive) violence follows from the narrator's frustration both with David's refusal to give her information and with conventional modes of storytelling: "Dulcie is surrounded by a mystique that I am determined to crush with facts: age, occupation, marital status, what she wears, where she was born and raised—necessary details from which to patch together a character who can be inserted at suitable points into the story" (DS 78). The narrator acknowledges the violence inherent in storytelling: that the compulsion for facts seeks to murder the "mystique" or the Dulcieness that makes Dulcie resistant to narrative. By using the constellation as a model for the story that belongs to David, but is ultimately about Dulcie,

the novel critiques David's desire for a linear, masculine narrative that, incidentally, subsumes the stories of the women without whom his story would never have been possible.

David's own method of mapping history can be found in the Griqua family tree at the beginning of the book. David wants to trace his bloodline to the Griquas, who sought their own homeland and whose chief, Andrew le Fleur, would later support apartheid. As far as the family tree is a historical record, it raises more questions about David's genealogy than it answers. The first five generations of Kok men are, according to the tree, produced with no help from women. Rachael Susanna Kok is the first daughter, and even she is motherless. Besides the lack of women, there are names missing from the tree, such as Eduard la Fleur's children, their names marked with an X. The family name also changes between Eduard la Fleur, who has the feminine article *la*, in contrast to the masculine *le*, that appears with his grandson Abraham le Fleur. The shift between articles remains unexplained and demonstrates another example of inconsistency that, in and of itself, reinforces David's incompetence as a historian. By letting David's family tree stand with its omissions (there are many people missing and few dates) at the beginning of the novel, the narrator silently demonstrates that his linear, or genealogical, historical understanding fails to comprehend the importance of his historical moment.

David's version of his story is the "document of civilization" whose silencing of Dulcie's story makes it at the same time a "document of barbarism" (Benjamin 1969, 256). Not only does his story entail casting the antiapartheid struggle as heroically masculine and linearly intelligible, his historical understanding has clear affinities with the historicism Benjamin critiques. The narrator says that "in his eagerness to historicise, to link things—his own life with the lives of [Saartje] Baartman and the Griqua chief—he made a mess of the dates and lost a century" (DS 2). While Benjamin presents the critique of historicism in theoretical terms, the novel plays out the concrete ways in which historicism is inadequate. David's desire for a continuity between himself and the historical past leads him to botch the time line. Though the novel is fragmentary in form and frequently jumps in time, David's erasure of a century is generically inappropriate. If he is trying to write a history in which things progress chronologically, jumping over one hundred years thwarts that very project. It is motivated by a historicist selectivity that Wicomb insists is also at its heart masculinist. To preserve his connection with the

men of his family line, he willingly leaves out the women without whom he would not be there.

David's inclusion of Saartje Baartman (the so-called "Hottentot Venus") is motivated less by feminist inclusiveness than by a masculinist identification with Baartman's exploiters. He is not interested in her, just in Cuvier's analysis of her body. While writing about the two, David "found his interest deflected from outrage on Baartman's behalf to fascination with Cuvier's mind, with the intellectual life he imagined for the anatomist" (33). David thinks of Cuvier's discoveries in military terms, in which "the deadly combat of ideas" are "military fronts where function finally triumphed over form." David can identify with Cuvier more readily than he can identify with Baartman because they, David and Cuvier, both fit into the same militaristic, masculinist discourse. In a text where function and form are interconnected, David's thoughts draw on the sexist tradition of the masculine as function and feminine as form. It is important that he understands this relationship as a dominative one in which function "triumphed." Cuvier's "anatomical studies of Baartman's genitalia" angers David only when he thinks of "a reader turning to that page." David is unconsciously revealing what the narrator understands about his foray into the Cuvier/Baartman history: "It had really been an exercise in avoidance." Thinking too long about Baartman brings Dulcie to mind, and it is unbearable. While the narrator's focus is on the stories of the women as they have been occluded by the male power structure (*history*), David continues to resist inclusion of the feminine in his story.

David's resistance to the feminine comes from the fact that stories of feminine resistance risk revealing to him how his masculinist history of the struggle contains within it the "document of barbarism," or the ANC's treatment of women (Benjamin 1969, 256).¹¹ If the first example of David's resistance concerns the family tree, even the lopsidedness of that tree (its almost complete lack of women) does not succeed in keeping women out of his story. The complete erasure of women becomes impossible when David hires a female amanuensis—it is as if he can't help but include the very femininity he wants, at another level, to exclude. David admonishes the narrator for turning his story into "a story of women," as the narrator looks for a medium in which faithful representation of Dulcie is possible (*DS* 199). The disruptive, nonrepresentational "traumatization" of the narrative form registers the insolubility of the dilemma Dulcie poses.

While I argue that Dulcie cannot be adequately, faithfully represented in the current modes of historical representation, David, too, poses a problem because of his relationship to the antiapartheid movement. That movement has trained him in modes of secrecy that the narrator finds exasperating: "What else can I do? If it's not really to be about you, if you won't give me any facts, if you will only give me mumbo jumbo stuff, my task is to invent a structure, some kind of reed pondok in which your voodoo shadow can thrash about without rhyme or reason, but at least with boundaries so that we don't lose you altogether." Here the narrator proposes that David's dedication to secrecy—a dedication born of training and loyalty to the antiapartheid cause—cripples her ability to tell his story. He will not give her facts because he cannot. Not only does the cause prohibit him from disclosure, he also cannot confront his complicity in the ANC's torture at Camp Quatro. Though he himself was imprisoned at Quatro and experienced torture, his identification with the heroism of the ANC requires subordinating his personal feelings to the movement and its needs. Through his self-sacrifice, he becomes a participant in the movement's silencing of women.¹² Since David does not speak up for, nor does he challenge, the gendered attack on Dulcie, he is complicit in her torture as well as in his own destruction. To tell his story would be to reveal his role in creating the document of civilization that contains Dulcie's suffering.

Thus, he gives the responsibility of his story, the position of amanuensis, to the female narrator. In choosing her, David makes an unconscious gesture toward the fact that, in telling his story, he also tells the stories of Dulcie and others (women). The narrator does what she can with his evasions and the little scraps of information that he gives her. She tries to faithfully represent him because she does not want "to lose [him] altogether" (199). For different reasons, both Dulcie and David become ethereal "voodoo shadows" because of the way they challenge the representational modes that seek to contain them. David asks that Dulcie never speak, which seems self-serving and disappointing. David, however, understands that Dulcie's experience challenges any arrangement of words that could try to put a voice to it. Nonetheless, the narrator does not accept silence as a viable response to Dulcie's struggle. The novel is a testament to a rejection of silence and, through its form, rejects the structures that circumscribe experience.

Recovering Dulcie: forms and fictions

David and the narrator clash over how to represent Dulcie. David thinks she cannot, and should not, be represented, but the narrator is determined to invent a form adequate to depicting her. Since Dulcie's story has "no progression in time, no beginning and no end," that means, according to David, you cannot call it "story" (150). David's chosen form, one made up of "and then and then and then," plays counterpoint to the novel's ambitions: it's a modeling of the causal relationships that the narrative refuses to draw (151). David tells his children stories in the fairy-tale form, stringing sentences together with coordinating conjunctions to emphasize progress toward a happy ending.¹³ Dulcie's story has no such progress and thus deeply troubles David and his convictions about storytelling, which are directly related to his own sense of self. But there are other forms of representation besides "story" with the implied capital S. The novel is one such form, made up of the "anecdotes, sorry clutch of hints and innuendos" that "do not lead to anything." The form of the novel evokes Benjamin's fragmentary history and suggests an alternative to teleological histories like David's. Benjamin gives us a format in which stories, irreconcilable with the dominant narrative, can still be told without damaging them. This kind of modernist recovery (a recovery predicated on the possibilities afforded by language) is at the heart of Wicomb's novel, as the narrator relies on the revolutions of the word before her to tell Dulcie and David's stories.

Dulcie's refusal to be assimilated into a story form intelligible to David disturbs his subjective cohesion. His only recourse is to "abstract her"—to construe her as a notional or nonrepresentational "ideal"—which the narrator steadfastly resists (134). He "doesn't see the need to flesh her out with detail" and instead thinks of Dulcie as "a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story." The narrator laughs at him because she somehow knows that "Dulcie herself would never scream." The tension here is twofold. First, David cannot grant Dulcie form. He reduces her to a scream that echoes throughout the novel to prevent Dulcie from being further traumatized by representational specificity and to avoid confronting his own implication in Dulcie's suffering. As a member of the ANC, identifying with their mission, and as a victim of torture himself, David's relationship with Dulcie is too complicated for him to face. Second, the narrator is acutely aware of Dulcie's physiological reality: because she is dead, she physically cannot scream, but the text provides

ways for her scream to be heard. The narrator makes a chilling observation that “a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice—and . . . there is no such order to which she can appeal.” The narrator refuses the idea that Dulcie would scream because the narrator believes she has no one to listen to her and no one to comprehend her pain. David understands what the narrator articulates and, by reducing Dulcie to a ghostly presence, he attempts to circumvent representing the reality that she both lives and represents. His attempt is not entirely successful, however, because the narrator exerts her own kind of power over the story.

The narrator’s silent presence emphasizes David’s inability to tell his story. David “wants [Dulcie] simply outlined” or “wants her traced” because he cannot actually do it himself (150). The agency of storytelling belongs to the unnamed narrator and so she outlines and traces Dulcie into a Benjaminian constellation. Dulcie falls into the category of “an eternal, inescapable present” that is not completely negative because she surfaces at moments of danger in the text. The tension between Wicomb’s and Benjamin’s texts comes out of Wicomb’s designator of “present” and Benjamin’s of “past.” Neither masculinist nor feminist discourses can accommodate Dulcie because her experience occupies both past and present: echoes of her story ring throughout the book, from Beeswater 1922 to Kokstad 1991. While the narrative focuses on David’s problematic attempts to narrate his story, the narrator’s involvement is also problematic, since she is not an unbiased medium. She, too, has her own project in trying to reconcile her feminist background (David pokes fun at her liberal arts education) with Dulcie’s experience. The narrator is troubled by the way Dulcie hovers between fact and fiction and says, “[sometimes] I believe in her fictionality,” which brings the narrator “a sense of relief” (124). To imagine Dulcie in her entirety exhausts the narrator because she requires an invention of new forms through which to depict her, without either erasing her or making her a new subject of history who merely tells a new homogenous story. Dulcie can be invoked and shaped through multiple forms and stories, as demonstrated when the narrator turns to *Macbeth* to connect to Dulcie.

The narrator triangulates her relationship to Dulcie through Lady Macbeth. When we first meet Dulcie, she washes “the sticky red from her hands and watches the water run clear” (18). The narrator makes the literary connection, “like Lady Macbeth,” which David rejects because “power has never held any lure” for Dulcie. David, of course, reads

Macbeth only through Macbeth's masculine, power-hungry experience. But Lady Macbeth's story is not entirely about power: while she is instrumental in instigating the bloodshed, the dominative, masculine power system in which she becomes implicated drives her insane. She keeps washing her hands in her sleep, but the psychic blood never comes off. While Lady Macbeth's madness leads to her suicide, much as David's own guilt will lead to his, David's refusal to see the obvious connections underscores how difficult it is for him to understand the position of the female guerilla. The narrator, however, identifies with both Dulcie and Lady Macbeth through the motif of hand washing: at the last line of the novel, she says, "I wash my hands of this story," as if the story itself were blood (213). The narrator thus metonymically links herself to Dulcie through hands and blood, reemphasizing the violence associated with storytelling. But unlike Lady Macbeth and Dulcie, for the narrator the blood is not literal. It becomes a representation of the three women's navigations of systems hostile to their existence. Only the narrator survives, and even then her life is in danger. The cost of telling Dulcie's story, of telling David's story, could be death.

The end of the novel suggests that art is subject to the violence of historical forces and is vulnerable to erasure. In the last two pages of the novel, as previously discussed, someone leaves a message on the narrator's computer that reads: "*This text deletes itself*," and the same computer is shot by a man who then trespasses in her garden. Her manuscript is also deleted by the assailant, which suggests that he read it.¹⁴ Radical in its formal characteristics, even in terms of content, the text becomes a threat to the system. The deconstructionist language serves the oppressive system: to delete the text is to delete Dulcie. As she is erased, her struggle, and the struggle of so many others, disappears, for when people (especially women) exist only as discourse they can be erased with no trace, no consequence. The narrator understands the system that she's working against, however, probably thanks to David's well-founded paranoia, and has kept a copy of the story on a floppy disk in her pocket. Writing Dulcie's story is itself not enough to preserve her, to protect her memory: the story must also be guarded from erasure. What is at stake in this is not just the telling of David and Dulcie's story but also the story's enactment of language's recuperative capacity. Two moments toward the end of the text both question and affirm the potential power of language to make amends. The first is the narrator's description of David's drawing of Dulcie:

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There are the dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, like a dressmaker's dummy; arms bent the wrong way at the elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws.

There is a head, an upside-down smiling head, which admittedly does not resemble her, except for the outline of bushy hair.

I have no doubt that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page. (205)

The first implication of David's drawing is that his visual representation of Dulcie has "mutilated" her. Constituted of "geometrical shapes: squares, rectangles, triangles," the drawing translates Dulcie into yet another symbolic order that cannot accommodate her. David's shapes are as jumbled as his attempts to write his story which has, thus far, contained Dulcie's. Faced with the prospect of rendering Dulcie visible, David understands his own complicity and that his depiction of her is the same as her treatment at the hands of the torturers. Dulcie remains incomplete and illegible in the visual medium because David cannot tell her story for her without inflicting further damage. Translating her to symbols is harmful, the drawing suggests, and in the case of the novel, those symbols are letters. But, unlike David's attempts, the narrator's constellationary history and her rejection of the deconstructionist project provides for Dulcie a resting place.

The second moment, at the end of the novel, suggests to me the ways in which language, despite the fair critiques of it, can be reparative. In the last paragraphs, the text resurrects Dulcie's body. Turning away from her garden, the narrator sees her:

Only when I turn to go back to work do I see her sturdy steatopygous form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private. She is covered with goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds; she makes no attempt to wipe the insects away, to shake them off. Instead, she seems grateful for the cover of creatures in the blinding light and under the scorching sun. Blinking, she may or may not, through eyes covered by the hairy filaments of goggas, see a pair of shoes disappearing comically over the wall, a figure lifting itself over into the public street. She yawns and stretches in the warm sun.

Is this no longer my property? I ask myself. I have never thought of Dulcie as a visitor in my garden.¹⁵ (212)

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Dulcie's hallucinatory status here is the biggest warning in the text: she appears at a moment of danger, when the narrator is physically threatened, when her story is almost lost. But her physical appearance also confirms the novel's power to grant Dulcie a body, to give back to her a kind of form. She "yawns and stretches in the warm sun" and is "grateful for the cover of creatures in the blinding light." She is alive, comfortable, at ease, and "makes no attempt to wipe the insects away." The effect of putting Dulcie's story into a nonlinear form, or of putting her experience on the page, gives Dulcie an energetic new kind of life, suggested by the goggas and flies that are "crawling and buzzing." Outlining her, the bugs give her living, yet parasitic, boundaries. If the narrative fleshes Dulcie out, something David resisted, this active "fleshing" comes with a price. The bugs are also an instantiation of the violence that haunts the narrative, reenacting a violation as they give her "cover" from the blinding light and crawl in and out of her wounds and orifices. By covering her, the bugs hide and oppress her while at the same time lending her form. We do not get a description of Dulcie's body because of the bugs that represent the violence and oppression of that body, and thus the condition of possibility for Dulcie is a paradox: her representation can only erupt into the discourse through the repression and suppression of her body and her pain.

What is at stake in my reading of *David's Story* is justice. By filtering the experiences of both David and Dulcie (and even the narrator) through modernist intertexts, and constellating those experiences in a Benjaminian method, the novel invests itself in remembering and telling stories that undermine the dominant narrative—stories in which lived experiences contradict, in this instance, the ANC's ideology of heroism. The two moments I have discussed in closing sum up the project of the novel: a recovery of Dulcie's mangled story, privileged over postmodern plots that would render her unrecoverable. To endorse the idea that "*this text deletes itself*" would be to allow Dulcie to disappear without consequence. Formally, the novel proposes and plays out a method of writing history that "constellates" or relates the stories of different women in order to highlight Dulcie's story and the elements of resistance and suffering that she shares with women such as Antjie and Rachael Susanna. With a historical method predicated on the power of distance, fragmentation, and contiguity, the novel can counteract what Benjamin analyzes as the dominant, linear narrative.

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Linear history suggests a hierarchy, a conquering, with the “new” representing good and better, but Wicomb’s novel, bringing into close proximity stories that may seem unconnected and disparate, highlights the inadequacy of the linear model and illustrates why it is incapable of accommodating stories like Dulcie’s. The narrator rejects the “history with a teleology” (Kristeva 1981, 17), one made up of “and then and then and then.” Instead, she finds a new way to represent Dulcie, granting her silence, forming her out of juxtapositions and distances, imagining her through fictional characters, and resisting the urge to “crush her with facts” (DS 78). In this way, the narrator keeps the Joycean promise of a linguistic revolution while also retaining the Conradian horror: at the same time that the novel is innovative and hopeful in its telling and recovery, it is dedicated to preserving South African subjectivities that are forever marked by apartheid and its consequences. In a way that the Truth and Reconciliation Committee could not, the novel delivers a kind of justice by remembering Dulcie. It gives her a form without (discursively) killing her yet once more.



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Notes

1. I use the term *coloured* throughout this essay not to endorse that term but to indicate the racist classification of the mixed race of Dulcie, David, and the narrator. As Leonard Thompson writes in *A History of South Africa*, one of the key ideologies of the South African apartheid state was the classification of the population into “White, Coloured, Indian, and African” (2001, 190), with

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whites constituting the ruling class and the other racial categories denoting various (oppressive and violent) treatments under the law.

2. This reclaiming of modernist form for anticolonial historical fiction has an echo in Marlene Van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2010). That book engages in a modernist project that strikingly echoes that of William Faulkner. Like Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example, *Agaat* is a transgenerational family epic about racist dominion and the instrumentalization of land. It explores these issues by developing different narrative modes for telling Milla and Agaat's story: a present-day, first-person narration of Milla's interior life (which takes place on her deathbed and could almost be entitled *As I Lay Dying*); a second-person narration of Milla's earlier experiences and Agaat's place in them; and a series of diary entries that reveal (and conceal) things not present in the other modes. This multiplication of narrative strands produces a different kind of modernist effect than does Wicomb's novel—one concerned with stressing the limits of any singular linguistic form. But taken together, the novels suggest a move in South African literature toward engagements with the unique expressive and political possibilities that modernism affords. For a fuller account of postcolonial historical novels and their utopian qualities that does not discuss Wicomb but has influenced my understanding of the genre's possibilities, see Forter 2016.

3. David also spent time in Camp Quatro.

4. Todd Cleveland's "We Still Want the Truth: The ANC Angolan Camps and Post-apartheid Memory" addresses the fine line between telling a story and wanting to keep elements of it hidden. Cleveland focuses on transcripts from the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Committee) hearings. He notes that, though victims of the torture camps were able to voice their stories, justice was never served because the fundamental bargain of amnesty for testimony meant that officials did not have to pay for their crimes. The TRC thus brought into question the value of testimony and whether the "talking cure" was a viable solution in the face of so much violence.

5. As Dorothy Driver argues in her afterword:

For David, Dulcie remains at a stage of unrepresentability, not least because certain aspects of her treatment cannot be faced, since facing them would force him to confront his own past not only as victim but also as victimiser. Thus the notion of the unrepresentable, so fashionable a concept in postmodern and postcolonial debate, is deconstructed in Wicomb's text: it is given historical context and political force. The narrator's partial exclusion of the stories of Krotoa and Saartje Baartman offers a comment on the difficulties of telling Dulcie's story, and, in turn, Dulcie's story invites us to reinterpret Krotoa's and Saartje Baartman's—to make them less tidy, less readily comprehended. (2000, 232)

Driver cites Wicomb's essay "Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture" (1991) to emphasize that the question is less about "authenticity" and more about rearticulating stories to "explore and challenge power relations" (Wicomb quoted in Driver 2000, 232).

6. uMkhonto we Sizwe, MK for short, translates to "the Spear of the Nation."

7. Also the day that Joyce met his long-term partner, Nora Barnacle.

8. There is yet another parallel with Joyce's works, this time with *Finnegans Wake*, in a metafictional/metatextual way: the narrator is describing a moment between Joyce and his amanuensis, Samuel Beckett, when Beckett purposefully transcribes Joyce's unintentional "come in" (DS 35). The contrast between Joyce and Beckett and David and the amanuensis suggests something about the way the texts are composed. The gap between the author and the amanuensis gives the amanuensis power over the text: like Joyce did not intend Beckett to write down "come in," there are many ways in which the narrator writes down things that David did not intend, such as mentions of Dulcie. Put another way, like "come in" is true to the spirit of *Finnegans Wake*, the ways in which the narrator is careful around Dulcie is true to the heart of *David's Story*: how to represent Dulcie without trapping her.

9. Michael Valdez Moses argues in "Disorientalism: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics" that "Conrad, via his narrator Marlow, improvises an experimental set of representational devices meant to capture both the subjective experience and objective lineaments of a non-European, nonurban, and premodern reality, and in so doing, he helps generate a new style that we come to recognize retrospectively as *modernist*, a style subsequently employed and readapted by himself and other literary artists to the 'new' (and consequently) alienating conditions of the modern European imperial city" (2007, 56). Modernist technique, then, is born out of a confrontation between imperial subject and the colonized world, a confrontation that yields a discomfort with the imperial project and its methods of knowing or seeing. Moses's "analysis of the imperial sources of Conrad's modernism" is compelling and linked to mine by the conclusion that follows: many writers we label as postcolonial (Salman Rushdie and J. M. Coetzee, for example) are in fact "practitioners of late modernism" (2007, 67).

10. For a related effort to recover alternative histories and their temporalities, see Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of "the universal and necessary history we associate with capital. It [this history] forms the backbone of the usual narratives of transition to the capitalist mode of production" (2000, 63). Chakrabarty names this History 1 (or the history capital writes for itself) and

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posits History 2 in opposition. History 2s are made up of affective narratives and lived experiences that cannot be fully reconciled to the logic of capital. In other words, he takes up the Benjaminian approach to history to suggest that the dominant narratives (History 1) are written by capital but that these in no sense exhaust the domain of lived historical experience. The key innovation in Chakrabarty's understanding concerns his linking of all these matters to the problem of colonialism—a linkage not much present in Benjamin's essay.

11. See here, too, Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time," which develops a model for understanding the oppressive gendered constructions of time: "Female subjectivity . . . becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival—in other words the time of history" (1981, 17). Kristeva goes on to say that "this temporality renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal." David's conception of his own story, which differs from the story we get in *David's Story*, works to deny Dulcie's female subjectivity, which troubles his masculinist (or teleological) understanding of history.

12. David, in this way, carries a burden much like the women in the constellation I have just described. His burden is his story, which contains the story of Dulcie. Though I touch on this only tangentially, the novel is also interested in the psychological effect of the ANC's masculinist project on David (it is, after all, called *David's Story*).

13. Kristeva makes an interesting point about sentences as microcosms of linear time: "It might also be added that this linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending)" (1981, 17). In the context of my analysis, this comment usefully points to David's ambivalence about his story: while the coordinating conjunction acts as a marker of progress, it also suggests an endlessness that may reflect an inability on David's part to effectively tell, or at least finish, a story.

14. Attributing agency in the assaults on the narrator proves almost impossible, as we never really see the culprit(s).

15. Shane Graham suggests that the reality of Dulcie's physical being is what makes it so impossible for David to tell her story: "It is Dulcie's role as 'pure body' that makes her such a powerful illustration of the spatial material dimensions of trauma" (2008, 32).

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“Interested in Big Things, and Happy in Small Ways”: Curiosity in Edith Wharton

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Though written at the height of her powers, *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919) occupies a relatively marginal place in Edith Wharton's oeuvre. Composed of articles written during the war years, while Wharton was preoccupied with humanitarian relief efforts, the slim primer was intended to introduce American servicemen to French customs, in the expressed hope of promoting greater cross-cultural understanding (Lee 2013, 458). The question of whether the book in fact contributed to that worthy aim, like the question of what its intended audience made of such upmarket topics as traditional sitting arrangements at a French dinner party, remains open. Equally doubtful—certainly to our contemporary sensibilities—are its repeated and immoderate generalizations (“The French are the most human of the human race” [Wharton, 1919, x]) and some of its author's more tendentious contrasts (“The French woman is distinctly more grown up than her American sister” [120]). Still, the “unpretentious little book,” as Blake Nevius described it in his early study of Wharton (1953, 79), makes a useful accompanying piece to her more substantial work. For, as Nevius went on to show, Wharton's analysis of French culture offers us “the most concise formulation of her social ideal.”

At the core of this ideal, according to Nevius, were “*reverence, continuity, and taste*” (81)—values that Wharton regarded as imperative to any culture worthy of the name. They were certainly imperative, she believed, to her native America, a country “still, intellectually and artistically, in search of itself” (1919, xi). America, Wharton urged, would “profit more by seeking to find out why France is reverent, and what

she reveres, than by trying to inoculate her with a flippant disregard of her own past" (32). Adopting the French "sense of the preciousness of long accumulations of experience" (31), she hoped, might help her flighty compatriots outgrow their adolescent penchant for "irreverence, impatience," and "all sorts of rash and contemptuous short-cuts" (32). As Nevius argued, *French Ways* places such an inordinate emphasis on traditionalism because of Wharton's strong belief that its absence from American life has prevented the nation from achieving its "cultural coming-of-age" (1953, 80).

Nevius was no doubt right to insist on the centrality of reverence and continuity to Wharton's social ideal; hers was, in the final analysis, a conservative mind. Still, his account of Wharton's moral outlook fails to do justice to the complexity of her position, as it neglects to consider the vital role that curiosity plays in Wharton's conception of social and personal flourishing. The omission is conspicuous, for *French Ways* is peppered with paeans to French curiosity. "The general intellectual fearlessness of France" (Wharton 1919, 63); the nation's "dauntless curiosity" (59); "the idol-breaking instinct of the freest minds in the world" (30); "their perpetual desire for the new thing" (35)—such praise forms a constant counterpoint to the book's refrain about the French veneration for tradition, inviting a more nuanced reformulation of its author's social ideal. For the question now becomes how to reconcile Wharton's admiration for the iconoclasm of the French with her insistence on, and advocacy of, their "unquestioning respect for rules" (30). This question, I will try to show in the following, is consequential, for the conflict on which it bears—the conflict between reverence and curiosity—goes to the heart of Wharton's moral imagination.

Wharton herself was quite conscious of the tensions in her account. She ends *French Ways* with an apologetic gesture to the reader who may have found "incoherent" her foregoing attempt to "strike a balance between seemingly contradictory traits" (1919, 147) of the French mind. Still, striking such a balance is precisely the undeclared theme of her analysis. The exemplariness of French culture, as she describes it, consists in its successful harmonization of the apparently incompatible polar attitudes of curiosity and reverence—an achievement she is keen to explain. Following Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Wharton's *French Ways* strives to synthesize a moral position that might reconcile the competing claims made upon the Victorian self by its dual commitment to autonomy and normativity, to expressive individualism

and social stability. Its aim is to convince its reader that what Arnold called the “desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes” (1993, 59) and the instinct for social preservation are not merely compatible but mutually animating components of culture.

As Dale Bauer argues, Wharton’s responses to the issues of her day defy easy reduction to labels such as antimodernism or “nostalgic utopianism” (1994, xv). At the same time, Jennie Kassanoff (2004) is surely right that we would do well to look squarely at Wharton’s conservatism where we do find it, and avoid belabored apologetics once we’ve discovered that many of her views do not tally with our own. To ignore Wharton’s considered position, as Kassanoff cautions, is to risk “whitewashing the complexity of American cultural politics” (2004, 5). Following the play of curiosity as it weaves in and out of Wharton’s work is particularly useful in both regards, for it sheds light on some of the competing loyalties that structure and delimit her embattled humanism.

Beyond the critical insight it yields into her politics, exploring the fate of curiosity at work in Wharton’s writing may also help us see more deeply into the ways in which we today handle, and are handled by, this keyword. I agree with Phillip Barrish that there are good reasons to regard the trajectory leading from William Dean Howells to Richard Rorty as a single “long moment in white American liberalism” (2006, 5), and that we may therefore take advantage of the way realists like Henry James and Wharton “artistically trace and circumscribe the densely overcrossing lines and cracks of social and emotional ‘relations’” (6), so as to gain insight into aspects of present-day white liberal culture (both within the United States and, I would add, in its non-American offshoots). This does not amount to saying, foolishly, that white liberalism, however we specify its substance and purview, has passed unchanged through World War II, the Cold War, the Civil Rights era, Reaganism, and so on; but it is to claim that certain cultural patterns, certain assumptions, certain values and anxieties have survived the twentieth century in recognizable form. If this is so, then it is precisely our distance from the thick tissue of contingencies that defined Wharton’s cultural moment that may clarify the common ground we share with her and with the small but important circle in which she moved. Closely attending to the conflicts grinding under the surface of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realism might then provide us, as Barrish proposes, with “valuable alternative perspectives specifically on challenges and inner conflicts confronted by left-thinking people today” (4).

I shall return to the question of pertinence in the last part of the essay, after I have laid out a fuller account of the fate of curiosity in Wharton's fiction and nonfiction. This account begins in section 1 with a description of the Arnoldian theory of culture found in *French Ways*. According to this theory, cultural and personal flourishing depends as much on the segregation and regulation of curiosity as on its cultivation. The view of curiosity that Wharton makes explicit in *French Ways* is enforced with considerable consistency in her other texts. To make good on this claim, section 2 shall describe the shifting valences of curiosity, first in Wharton's autobiographical writing, where it figures as an unqualified virtue, and then in her social satires. It is there, in her novels—a genre in which, in Northrop Frye's words, "the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationship" (1990, 308)—that Wharton's conservative anxieties about the desire for novelty become salient.

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Wharton introduces her discussion of the relation between reverence and curiosity with an apocryphal gastronomic anecdote: "Throughout the length and breadth of France, the most fruit-loving and fruit-cultivating of countries, the same queer conviction prevails, and year after year the great natural crop of blackberries, nowhere better and more abundant, is abandoned to birds and insects because in some remote and perhaps prehistoric past an ancient Gaul once decreed that 'blackberries give the fever'" (1919, 20). What might explain this "queer conviction," especially since the innocuous fruit has been relished across the Channel for centuries with impunity? "Lack of curiosity about [the blackberry's] qualities," Wharton insists, is not the right answer, as the "thrifty, food-loving French peasant" (22) is a master of getting the most out of the environment. Rather, what accounts for this peculiar abstention is a reverential "respect for some ancient sanction which prevents those qualities from being investigated." Once a prohibition is inducted into French culture's hallowed repository of inherited ideas, Wharton states, it becomes impervious to doubt and revision. Such taboos "are as frequent in France as the blackberries in the hedges," she adds, and are, in her view, the secret to the nation's cultural endurance.

In Wharton's account, the willingness to leave certain prejudices and institutions inviolate is the compromise that French culture had achieved in the course of its long refinement. "No one can hope to

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understand the French," she writes, "without bearing in mind that this unquestioning respect for rules of which the meaning is forgotten acts as a perpetual necessary check to the idol-breaking instinct of the freest minds in the world" (30). Refraining from the consumption of the blackberry because of the decree of some anonymous forebear may seem absurd to an outsider, she grants, but the instinct behind it is sound. For one thing, preservationism is the prudent evolutionary strategy: "What ever survives the close filtering of time is likely to answer to some deep racial need, moral or aesthetic" (31). Second, and more importantly, the French "unquestioning respect" for tradition functions as a countervailing tendency, a "necessary check" to their constitutive iconoclasm. Aware of the socially destabilizing potential of their inquisitive natures, the French, claims Wharton, have evolved a self-protective countermeasure in the form of a cultivated reverence toward their shared past.

Having argued for the judiciousness of French conservatism, Wharton is now in a position to advance her core claim: "It may sound like a poor paradox to say that the French are *traditional about small things* because they are *so free about big ones*" (30, emphasis mine). What the French case teaches is that curiosity and reverence are only apparently antagonistic. When properly managed, the two attitudes are, in fact, mutually enabling. The particular genius of the French consists in maintaining this delicate balance, which frees them to inquire into the entire spectrum of human experience—including "subjects and situations that Anglo-Saxons, for the last hundred years (not before), have agreed not to mention" (60)—without fear of moral disorientation or identity loss. For unlike some of the younger nations, the French have the ballast of their traditions, prejudices, and conventions to offset the centrifugal pull of their ranging intellects, enabling them, as Michael Nowlin writes, "*to contain*—in the sense both of harboring and channeling—revolutionary impulses in politics, in mores, in art and ideas" (2004, 104). Being traditional about small things, Wharton is claiming, is in fact intellectually liberating. Properly realized, curiosity and reverence license and enliven each other. Turning momentarily to her fiction, we can see this ideal illustrated in the figure of Raymond de Chelles of the *Custom of the Country* (1913), in whom "openness to finer sensations [and] a sense of the come-and-go of ideas" is controlled by "the tight hold of two or three inherited notions, religious, political, and domestic, in total contradiction to his surface attitude" (Wharton 1985b, 804).

The key to Wharton's understanding of the French achievement lies in her seemingly casual distinction between "small things" and "big ones" italicized above. She evidently thought so well of this formulation that we find it repeated almost verbatim in the preface to *A Backward Glance* (1934), where being "insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small ways" (1990a, 771) is presented as the secret to a happy old age. The gist in both cases is the same: curiosity is praiseworthy when it probes into "big" things, and blameworthy when it inquires into "small" matters. That is, what distinguishes properly realized curiosity (or reverence) from the defective kind is not the nature of the attitude but the species of its object.

What, then, qualifies one thing as "big," and hence as an appropriate object of curiosity, and another as "small," about which one should be "traditional"? Crucial though this issue is to Wharton's argument, she does not clarify the matter in her own voice. For an answer, we must turn therefore to one of her characters, Madame de Chantelle of *The Reef* (1912). The following takes place after that august lady has discovered that her grandson Owen plans to marry the family's governess. The distraught grandmother appeals to George Darrow for help in averting the imminent disaster, for which she holds Owen's stepmother, Anna Leath, partly responsible:

"Don't think, please, that I'm casting the least reflection on Anna, or showing any want of sympathy for her, when I say that I consider her partly responsible for what's happened. Anna is 'modern'—I believe that's what it's called when you read unsettling books and admire hideous pictures. Indeed," Madame de Chantelle continued, leaning confidentially forward, "I myself have always more or less lived in that atmosphere: my son [Fraser Leath, Anna's dead husband and Owen's father], you know, was very revolutionary. Only *he didn't, of course, apply his ideas: they were purely intellectual*. That's what dear Anna has always failed to understand. And I'm afraid she's created the same kind of confusion in Owen's mind—led him to *mix up things you read about with things you do*." (1985d, 489, emphasis mine)

However much she may have balked at the suggestion, Wharton is of one mind with the priggish Madame on this point. For the latter's distinction between the things one reads about and the things one does neatly

corresponds to the distinction between things big and small previously discussed. Doubling back to the question that had led us here, we now see that the honorific “big” is Wharton’s name for “purely intellectual” interests—usually pertaining to the latest in the arts and sciences—whereas its coy opposite, “small,” covers what is in fact the whole of one’s social comportment, up to and including one’s choice of spouse. Curiosity, then, is appropriate only as long as it is restricted to one’s leisured intellectual pursuits. There, in Lawrence Selden’s rarefied “republic of the spirit” (Wharton 1985c, 71), away from the mean dependencies and duties of social life, one may be as “revolutionary” and “modern” as one pleases. Trouble, for Wharton (as for Madame de Chantelle) begins when the boundary between the “things you read about” and the “things you do” is overstepped, when the attitude appropriate to one’s private project of intellectual self-cultivation is applied to matters of social conduct and identity. Propriety and social stability require that curiosity be quarantined to matters individual, private, and cerebral. Accordingly, whenever curiosity turns, in her novels, from speculative to active, tragedy ensues.

Writing about the nascent discourses of curiosity in early modern Europe, Neil Kenny observes that the “point of evoking curiosity was almost always to regulate knowledge or behaviour” (2004, 1). The same could be said of Wharton’s deployment of the term. On the one hand, she extols curiosity as the best part of us—a position she repeatedly reinforces in her scornful parodies of the intellectual complaisance of the upper classes and the degraded philistinism of the midwestern upstarts. On the other hand, she deals harshly with characters whose curiosity becomes active and transgressive, and thus a threat to established norms and tribal allegiances. When it comes to issues of conduct and class loyalty, irreverence in Wharton exacts a steep price (albeit one not always paid by the curious romantic himself).¹ Her social ideal can accommodate such conflicting attitudes toward curiosity precisely because of the tidy distinction it draws between the private-intellectual and social-practical realms. Taken en masse, her invocations of the term, to return to Kenny’s claim, disclose a regulative pattern that distinguishes those objects and practices about which one may be curious from those toward which one should show reverence.

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As mentioned above, Wharton opens *A Backward Glance* by praising the antiaging properties of intellectual curiosity. This positive view carries over into the memoir's first episode, which describes what she calls "the birth of the conscious and feminine *me* in the little girl's vague soul" (1990a, 778). Like many of her novels, *A Backward Glance* opens upon a public scene: New York's Fifth Avenue of the 1860s. A bonneted young child is strolling up the thoroughfare hand in hand with her father. Close attention is lavished, in good Whartonian fashion, on the scene's visual details, in particular on the avenue's long-vanished oddities: "the fenced-in plot of ground where the old Miss Kennedys' cows were pastured, and the truncated Egyptian pyramid which so strangely served as a reservoir for New York's water supply." The descriptive passage is interrupted when the girl's father informs her of the approach of a certain Cousin Henry. "The news was very interesting," Wharton recalls:

because in attendance on Cousin Henry was a small person, no bigger than herself, who must obviously be Cousin Henry's little boy Daniel, and therefore somehow belong to the little girl. So when the tall legs and the stocky ones halted for a talk, which took place somewhere high up in the air, and the small Daniel and Edith found themselves face to face close to the pavement, the little girl peered with interest at the little boy through the white woollen mist over her face. The little boy, who was very round and rosy, looked back with equal interest; and suddenly he put out a chubby hand, lifted the little girl's veil, and boldly planted a kiss on her cheek. It was the first time—and the little girl found it very pleasant.

Summing up this "earliest definite memory," Wharton credits the birth of her self-consciousness to nascent erotic and narcissistic impulses. "I was wakened to conscious life," she writes, "by the two tremendous forces of love and vanity." The singling out of little Daniel for amorous attention, while being aware of having been singled out by him for the same, catalyzes Edith's transformation from a "soft anonymous morsel of humanity" (777) to a self-conscious subject of "love and vanity." Yet Wharton's myth of self-genesis may also be read as an illustration of the animating power of yet another force—curiosity. For what it describes, after all, is a moment of mutual inquisitiveness rewarded: it is the pronounced interest that the child takes in her similarly interested peer

that turns her into a receptive vessel for love and vanity to then suffuse and kindle. Stimulating Wharton's awakening, we might therefore say, is a prior moment of curious attention.

Wharton's self-ascribed "restless curiosity" (819) plays a still more explicit role in the subsequent pages of her memoir. Indeed, her account of her early life can be summarized as a tale of how a young inquisitive mind had managed to transcend its incurious environment. This is the theme that drives Wharton's account of her early reading habits. Young Edith was an "omnivorous reader" (833) who spent her early years either making up stories or ploughing through her father's library. Her pronounced bookishness was a cause of mild consternation for the Joneses, who, though scrupulous when it came to linguistic decorum, "were far from intellectual . . . read little and studied not at all" (820). "It was thought," Wharton remarks, so as to highlight her constitutional difference from her parents and their milieu, "that I read too much (as if a born reader could!), and that my mind must be spared all 'strain'" (819).

The comparison between her own natural inquisitiveness and the intellectual torpor of her early environment is struck once again when Wharton describes her bafflement at the complete indifference to travel that she discovered in Boston after her marriage to Teddy. While her own fellow New Yorkers "were never so happy as when they were hurrying on board the ocean liner which was to carry them to new lands," the members of her husband's "wealthy and sedentary" Bostonian circle displayed an utter "incuriosity . . . with regard to the rest of the world" (831). To the young but already seasoned globetrotter, such obliviousness was unfathomable.

However, lest her readers now mistake New York's enthusiasm for transatlantic voyages for *genuine* curiosity, Wharton hastens to qualify her earlier remarks. As it turns out, once on European soil, New Yorkers devolved into the most timid of sightseers, dutifully ticking off the requisite "ruins, snow-mountains, lakes and water-falls—especially water-falls" on the way to their real destination: "the shops!" (832). Far from displaying a curious openness to experience, New Yorkers on the road seemed to Wharton strangely bent on squandering the opportunity to profit from "the artistic and intellectual advantages of European travel" (831). Keeping strictly to their own kind and abjuring all but unavoidable contact with the locals and their alien ways, they effectively re-created their familiar social environment in foreign surroundings.² Itinerant New

York, as it turns out, was only marginally better than sedentary Boston with which it was initially contrasted. Both circles were isolationist and allergic to the unfamiliar—weaknesses that, for Wharton, hearken back to the fundamental vice of incuriosity.

That failing is one of the most recurrent charges that Wharton levels at Old New York. However much she may have come to revise her views of the lost world of her youth, her nostalgia did not extend to what she regarded as its deadening intellectual lassitude. In her fictions, characters that symbolize this collective debility are described as drained of Eros to the point of appearing only nominally alive. The “rosy death-in-life” (Wharton 1985a, 1056) of the van der Luydens, Old New York’s wraithlike eminences in *The Age of Innocence* (1920), is one example of this blank condition; the dusty effluvium of “inanimate elegance” exuded by Madame de Chantelle in *The Reef*, is another (1985d, 448). But the figure that best represents this enervated state is, of course, May Welland, that “terrifying product of the social system” (1985a, 1049) whose “vacant serenity” (1127) discloses a mind both “uncomplicated and incurious” (1170). The last flower of an exhausted patch, May is a cautionary figure who epitomizes the link between incuriosity and the lack of individual substance.

While Wharton’s criticism of the lack of imagination and anti-intellectualism of her milieu is often tempered by elegiac wistfulness, no such allowances are made for the midwestern arrivistes, who appear in her eyes a far more frightening variant of what Emerson called the “sluggard intellect of this continent” (1983a, 53). For unlike the northeastern elites who seem content to wither away in proud self-isolation, the energetic buccaneers are quickly recasting the country in their mold, an alarmingly efficient fusion of brazen cultural illiteracy and entrepreneurial vigor. The spectacle of a thoroughly consumerist America was anathema to Wharton, making her satire of the American *homo economicus* both more anxious and more malicious than her send-up of the fading patrician class.

Consider, for instance, the Spragg family’s bungled European journey in *The Custom of the Country*. Having been strong-armed by their daughter into making the transatlantic voyage, the aging midwesterners find themselves reluctant tourists in a world they are neither equipped to appreciate nor inclined to enjoy. Appropriately, the only impressions that register in Mr. Spragg’s mind, as the family dawdles from one holiday spot to another, relate to the local hotel industry: “He was haunted by

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a statistical curiosity as to [the hotels'] size, their number, their cost and their capacity for housing and feeding the incalculable hordes of his countrymen" (Wharton 1985b, 872–73). After carefully tabulating the data, Spragg comes to certain grim conclusions regarding the business sanity of the locals, whose "European inferiority" he surmises from the "non-existence of the cold-storage system" (873). Meanwhile, the scatterbrained Mrs. Spragg, devoid even of her husband's saving interest in hotelry, cuts a still more lamentable figure. Stranded amidst Europe's splendors, her "shrinking from everything new and unfamiliar [develops] into a kind of settled terror." Finally, much to her and her husband's relief, the two are granted leave by the imperious Undine to return to the States, where Mrs. Spragg can languish in more familiar surroundings, and Mr. Spragg apply his "statistical curiosity" to its natural function: "[making] the money to pay for all this."³

In Wharton's Arnoldian view, Mr. Spragg's dismissal of European civilization on the basis of its lack of refrigeration hinges on the philistine confusion between technological advancement and cultural superiority. Technology, Arnold urged, belongs to the external machinery of life, while culture, like religion, is an "internal condition . . . the growth and predominance of our humanity proper" (1993, 61–62). Concurring with this view, Wharton regards the kind of self-congratulatory materialism embodied by the American Babbitt as an even graver threat than the laxity of the country's elites. True culture, she holds with Arnold, is first and foremost an inward state, set off from the "external" domain of having and getting, and one that depends on the restless desire to transcend the limits of one's knowledge, to expand one's intellectual capacity for nuanced appreciation.

Wharton's autobiographical and satirical writing offers, as we've seen, a fairly unambiguous picture of curiosity as a life-enhancing, generative force. When writing in these modes, Wharton identifies the term with creation, growth, flexibility, and open-mindedness, while linking incuriosity with exhaustion, atrophy, parochialism, and moral rigidity. Tapping into these associations allows her to craft her self-narrative "as one of solitude, self-education, and self-creation" (Lee 2013, 40), while also constructing a moral position from which to satirize the enemies of culture.

All this would have been fairly uncontroversial to Wharton's early twentieth-century audience. Few readers, then as now, would have

denied that “insatiable in intellectual curiosity” (Wharton 1990a, 771) is a salutary way to be. We stand, in this respect, along with Wharton and her contemporaries at the tail end of a long process of transvaluation, which had all but reversed the age-old suspicion of curiosity. By Wharton’s time, the desire for novelty and knowledge—the desire denounced by St. Augustine as a sin—courting “concupiscence of the eyes”⁴ (1960, 264)—had become a central liberal virtue.

Accounts of this reversal of values trace it to the early modern period. Hans Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* locates the emergence of the modern concept of curiosity in the Copernican sixteenth century ([1966] 1983, 227–453), while Barbara Benedict’s cultural history of curiosity isolates 1660–1820 as the period during which “curiosity rose to a peak of frenzied attention” (2001, 2). Among the factors that contributed to this explosion of discourse were the stream of novel commodities flowing into Europe from the colonies, the institutionalizing of natural philosophy in bodies like the Royal Society, and the antitraditional implications of Cartesian and Lockean epistemologies. Crackling with the tensions of the revolutionary eighteenth century, curiosity quickly became a political lightning rod, charged as either “heroic” or “deluded” (71), according to the social, moral, and religious commitments of the writer.

Empirical science and the realist novel were two institutions that reflected and galvanized curiosity’s changing fortunes. In Ian Watt’s well-known account, modern literary realism, along with its scientific counterpart, could take root and flourish because of the eighteenth century’s “critical, antitraditional and innovating” (2001, 12) climate of thought, which wrested epistemological authority from tradition and reinvested it in the individual. As beneficiaries of this intellectual reorientation, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Joseph Fielding helped give moral shape to the modern inquisitive subject, the kind of hero or heroine (usually heroine) who would become the *sine qua non* of realist representation. For Hilary Schor (2013), the implications of these developments reach still further. “Without curiosity,” she writes, “there would never be any such thing as the realist novel [and] it was the novel that brought the modern feminist subject into being” (2013, 2). Yet, with all respect to the novel, it was probably curiosity’s intimate association with science that tipped the scale and guaranteed the term’s ascendance. As Anne DeWitt has recently shown, nineteenth-century scientific

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discourse not only crucially supplied inquisitiveness with a professional identity, it also twinned the inquiry into nature's mysteries with the cultivation of moral excellence (2013, 1, 7-8), making the figure of the scientist into a cultural paragon. Riding on science's coattails, curiosity rose to become the key word and value we know it as today.

Still, latent concerns about the novel's virtue persisted. As Kenny comments, the early modern period ushered in an "overall (but by no means total) reversal of the pejorative evaluation of 'curiosity'" (2004, 44). As the case of Edmund Burke demonstrates, the term remained controversial well into the eighteenth century. Perhaps already attuned to its overtones of political insurgency, the young Burke begins his treatise of aesthetic psychology, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), with a denunciation of curiosity as an agitated state of fascination with mere novelty. Curiosity, he writes, is the "most superficial of all the affectations" (2008, 31), and one that must be checked if the mind is to appreciate the appeal of qualities beyond facile newness in its objects. Thirty-four years later, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke reiterates the self-same critique, only this time as part of his fulmination against the rising "monied interest" (2001, 275), who, along with the inciting "literary cabal" (276) of progressive writers, he holds responsible for the revolutionary discord in France. For Burke, it is these groups' reckless hankering after "innovation," their disastrous tendency to "[fall] in more naturally with any novelties," that explains their attack on the "noble ancient landed interest" and on the humane values of continuity and order that it represents. In a single rhetorical performance, Burke thus casts himself as a quizzical observer of what David Bromwich has called the "full-scale experiment of the human creature upon itself" (2014, 13) taking place in France, while also insinuating a link between curiosity and political irresponsibility—a link embodied, in his view, by the unholy alliance of financial and intellectual forces that would undo French society.

Very much a Burkean conservative on social matters, Wharton becomes hostile to curiosity when it threatens to violate established cultural patterns. Such violation, in her novels, typically takes the form of a cross-class affair between an upper-class dilettante and a lower-class woman. And while this trope is as old as the realist novel, Wharton's use of it is distinguished by being much more prohibitive than that of her predecessors. For earlier realists—say, Jane Austen, Mrs. Gaskell, or William

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Dean Howells—cross-class love typically served as a literary solution to the challenges of social change. The staple marriage plot, which conjoins representatives of different social groups in a romantically legitimated commonality of interests and, given the expected run of things, of blood, was the genre's primary device for mollifying class tensions. But whereas Howell's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), for example, depicts such a successful union in the marriage of Tom Corey and Penelope Lapham, in Wharton's novels romances between members of unequal social classes routinely end in catastrophe. Having allowed their curiosity to get the better of their group loyalties, her straying romantics find themselves beaten back into place by fate, society, or both.

The motive for the cross-class affair, in Wharton, is never simply lust. Indeed, sexual desire is as closely linked with curiosity in her imagination as they are in Freud's. Lucius Harney's titillated cry upon discovering Charity Royall's shameful origins, "You're from the Mountain? How curious! I suppose that's why you're so different" (Wharton 1990b, 191), could have been uttered by any number of Wharton's curious upper-class lovers. Even the most callous of these—Harney and Darrow come to mind—are not out solely for illicit carnal gratification. Aching for a respite from the limits and constraints of their social identities, they embark on their escapades among the lower orders as much for spiritual as for sexual rejuvenation.

Ralph Marvell's sad fate makes him the starkest example of his kind. A self-styled student of the new monied class, Ralph is enticed no less by the Spraggs' cultural difference than by their daughter's physical charms: "Surveying the march of civilization from a loftier angle, [Ralph] had early mingled with the Invaders, and curiously observed their rites and customs. But most of those he had met had already been modified by contact with the indigenous: they spoke the same language as his, though on their lips it had often so different a meaning" (Wharton 1985b, 673). Like fellow dilettantes Lawrence Selden, Charles Bowen, and George Frenside, Ralph's natural posture is that of the inquisitive "drawing-room naturalist" who surveys, analyzes, and classifies the social scene (1985c, 121). Yet unlike the latter, more passive onlookers, Ralph's curiosity becomes actively transgressive. His choice to marry the daughter of the "Invaders" (1985b, 673) amounts, in Wharton's strict view of class division, to an act of miscegenation, and it seals his fate.

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Ralph imagines that he has found in Undine not only a beguiling curiosity but also a curious fellow traveler. As he soon discovers, however, his young bride lacks “the adventurous curiosity which seeks its occasion in the unknown” (859). By the end of their honeymoon Ralph has come to realize that Undine’s “constitutional restlessness” (966) is not the mark of keen receptivity, as he had erred in believing, but of a steely single-mindedness. Never in doubt about her transient but always well-defined goals, Undine can tolerate neither indecisiveness nor ambiguity. Her father’s daughter, she recognizes only two possible outcomes to any venture: profit or loss. Indeed, the coordinates of her moral world barely intersect with those of her husband’s. While Ralph moves in a chiaroscuro landscape of nuance and equivocation, her universe is as clear-cut as a military battle plan.⁵ Fittingly, while the “heroically awful” (Preston 2000, 38) Undine is drawn on an almost epic scale, poor Ralph is merely poignant. After being robbed of his custody of their son, he puts a bullet in his brain. Unfazed, she forges on.

This pattern recurs, if with a less tragic outcome, in *The Age of Innocence*. Newland Archer’s error, like Ralph’s, consists of being curious where he should have been reverent, of mixing up the “things you read about” with the “things you do.” Having “read more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world, than any other man of the number” (Wharton 1985a, 1021), Archer, at the beginning of his story, is that rarest of creatures, a curious Old New Yorker. His intellectual temperament sets him above the common run of his peers (it is hard to imagine Mr. Silerton Jackson or Lawrence Lefferts eagerly unpacking a package from London containing “a new volume of Herbert Spencer, another collection of the prolific Alphonse Daudet’s brilliant tales, and a novel called ‘Middlemarch’” [1125]). And it is this innate inquisitiveness—not naked sexual desire—that triggers his attraction to Ellen Olenska. Wharton indicates as much when, having placed Archer on the threshold of Ellen’s unconventional rooms in West 23rd Street, she makes “curiosity . . . his uppermost feeling” (1070). However, the more Archer succumbs to this irreverent state of mind at the expense of his obligations to his tribe, the more punitive Wharton’s treatment of him becomes. Genuine self-creation, rare as it is in her fiction, is never extended to scions of the old order. Those like Archer who attempt it are depicted as naive idealists attempting to evade ineluctable realities. Hence, the more entangled with Ellen he becomes, the sillier and more infantile

he is made to appear. His stuttering plea to Ellen, to brush civilization aside and abscond with him to some pastoral Never-Never Land ("I want—I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that—categories like that—won't exist" [1245]) represents the lowest point of this regression.

Archer is eventually set straight, first by the sober Ellen and then by his ruthlessly self-protective milieu. His eventual acquiescence to life with May signals his renunciation of curiosity and reaffirmation of the clan's perspective, with all its "trenchant divisions between right and wrong [which leave] so little scope for the unforeseen" (1294). Archer in effect reconciles himself to the prospect of living out his days as a finished product in an already-interpreted world—a choice reconfirmed by his decision not to ascend to Ellen's Paris apartment at the conclusion of the novel. Wharton, whose own self-narrative had turned on the theme of breaking out of received roles, understands the scope of this surrender. But while not unsympathetic to Archer's plight, she nevertheless sacrifices him on the altar of tradition and continuity. As his fate illustrates, Schor's claim about the Victorian novel remains true for Wharton: her characters must have just "enough curiosity to start a plot," but not too much, so as not to fall "beyond the reach of middle-class representation" (2013, 2).

In their common function as a point of contact between a self-isolating social class and the alien world beyond, Archer and Ralph (like Chelles and Darrow) represent fatal weaknesses in the immune system of their respective social bodies. Bred for leisured contemplation, they allow their cultivated curiosity to metastasize into an active principle that compromises the organic integrity of the collective. What had been a virtue when applied to one's leisured intellectual pursuits, turns into a moral shortsightedness that renders the curious mutineer oblivious to the overriding claims of the group. Wharton's novels redress the plot-instigating imbalance introduced by their curious characters, not by arriving at a more expansive social synthesis but by stifling the inquisitive impulse. By the end of the plot, the character, whose deviant curiosity had prevented him from appreciating the moral significance of the world he had betrayed, receives a grim lesson in the value of reverence.⁶ As, of course, do the readers.

A brief comparison with Henry James may prove instructive here. If, as Ross Posnock claims, the late James introduces "figures of illegibility," like Maggie Verver, who travel "beyond the conventional codes that

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impose intelligibility upon individual behavior" (1991, 3) and succeed in reimagining themselves (and thus enhance their society's moral vocabulary), Wharton nearly always frustrates the desire to break out of established patterns or effectively re-create oneself.⁷ Her sympathy toward those who try is curbed not so much by the hard-nosed "realism," with which she is often credited, but rather by her reverent traditionalism. Even in a novel like *The Age of Innocence*, with its heightened sensitivity to the transience of cultural values and forms, curiosity must remain locked within the bounds of social legibility if it is to be sanctioned.

§

Wharton's fiction and nonfiction, I've tried to show, stage a complicated negotiation of the values of reverence and curiosity. Trumpeting the desire for knowledge and novelty one moment, they obliquely circumscribe and defang it the next. Curiosity, which Wharton holds indispensable for personal cultivation, becomes malignant when it threatens to compromise continuity and order. To be a person of taste, in this view, comes down to knowing where one should be curious and where reverential. And it is precisely this capacity for discrimination that her novels strive to inculcate in their readers.

Far from idiosyncratic, Wharton's "solution" to the clash of commitments at the heart of her social ideal has a long pedigree in liberal thought. Madame de Chantelle's warning not to "mix up things you read about with things you do" is, if you will, Wharton's version of the Kantian dictum, "Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!" (Kant 1991, 59). The reason that curiosity poses such a persistent problem for the self-image that has come down to us from the Enlightenment has to do with the unprecedented value that classical liberalism has assigned to free inquiry and autonomy. That is, it is liberalism's enshrining of the resistance to dogma that placed it in the peculiar position of having to perpetually struggle to contain or preempt potential subversions, which are, in principle, warranted by its own self-image. This predicament accounts for the much-maligned wishy-washiness of the liberal mind-set, with its need to repeatedly compromise with its own professed values. And as the case of curiosity shows, the more central the value, the more belabored and ingenious this maneuvering becomes.

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If Wharton's management of curiosity remains pertinent today, it is because it discloses the way a broadly liberal perspective effectively contains the subversive impulse inherent in its own self-conception. Liberalism, as Lionel Trilling had pointed out, harbors a discrepancy—perhaps irremediable—between its abstract self-definition and its concrete existence:

In the very interests of its great primal act of imagination by which it establishes its essence and existence—in the interests, that is, of its vision of a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life—[liberalism] drifts toward a denial of the emotions and the imagination. And in the very interest of affirming its confidence in the power of the mind, it inclines to constrict and make mechanical its conception of the nature of mind. (1954, 9)

Founded upon a “lively sense of contingency and possibility,” actual liberalism, argues Trilling, had ended up having to superintend and manage its originary commitment to human pluralism (10). It had had to do so because of the overriding necessity to survive as a stable and shared identity-formation. In other words, while committed to maximal personal freedom, liberalism was also no less self-protective than its ideological rivals. This unstable combination of an impulse toward self-preservation and a commitment to the “general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life” has made the containment of curiosity into a distinctly involuted and troubled operation.

No contemporary phenomenon better illustrates this pattern than the popular TED talks. A veritable cult of the Big Idea, TED is perhaps the purest expression of our Arnoldianism, of our privatization and depoliticization of curiosity. As a glum Benjamin Bratton points out (while speaking on TED!), the “key rhetorical device for TED talks is a combination of epiphany and personal testimony,” a “personal journey of insight and realization” whose aim is to generate a “spiritual buzz” (2013). Bratton's point is that the TED format promises to enlarge our minds, while implicitly assuring us that this expansion will take place solely along familiar patterns. We are invited to take part in a quasi-spiritual experience that promises to leave us with an upgraded version of ourselves, a cleverer version of the same. Which is why, despite its declared belief in “the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world” (TED), TED

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is really in the business of corporate innovation, not social transformation. Ultimately, what the format's uniformly upbeat speakers offer their audiences are brightly packaged futures in which, as Bratton aptly puts it, "everything changes, so long as everything stays the same"—a phrase that pithily captures the disavowed fantasy at the heart of the liberal ideal that we share with Wharton.

There is of course another strain of American liberalism, one whose allegiance is to the untried, the experimental, and the as-yet unschematized. This is the tradition to which *The Liberal Imagination* wants to recall its readers, and it leads back to Emerson, not Arnold. In Trilling's invocation of "variousness and possibility" (1954, 8), we hear the echo of Emerson's long-standing summons "to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory and to do something without knowing how or why" (1983b, 414). This is a plea to renounce reverence, to turn one's back on the past, to live curiously. But despite a series of powerful advocates, from John Dewey through Trilling to Richard Rorty, Emerson's romantic-pragmatic option has so far remained largely untried. With Wharton, we remain Arnoldian about curiosity.



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Notes

1. While some, like Ralph Marvell or Raymond de Chelles, are made to pay dearly for their traversal of class boundaries, others, like Lucius Harney and George Darrow, escape relatively unscathed, leaving the jilted have-nots to

suffer the consequences of the affairs. Still, the lesson in all these cases is the same: cross-class relationships shall come to naught. Wharton peppers her novels with more minor incidents that further corroborate this view: for example, Freddy Van Osburgh's aborted entanglement with Norma Hatch in *The House of Mirth* (1905) and Owen Leath's with Sophy Viner in *The Reef*.

2. Wharton often dramatizes the self-isolation of Americans in Europe. The early parts of book 2 of *The House of Mirth* show how completely New York society could transpose itself and its intrigues to European locales (in this case, Monte Carlo). The French section of *The Custom of the Country* opens with a similar spectacle, as Charles Bowen watches the surge of "familiar faces" (Wharton 1985b, 802) colonizing the tables at the fashionable Nouveau Luxe restaurant in Paris.

3. While constant objects of satire, the Spraggs nevertheless elicit a measure of sympathy—Mrs. Spragg for her haplessness, Mr Spragg for his solicitous concern for the victimized Ralph. But only rarely does Wharton make such allowances for her midwestern philistines. Consider her treatment of that most satirized of institutions, the small-town ladies' book club. Like the preening members of the Thanatopsis Club in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920), the "indomitable huntresses of erudition" (Wharton 1958, 16) of the Hillbridge women's study group in Wharton's "Xingu" (1916) are arraigned before the reader with the sole aim of condemning the degradation of culture under the combined pressures of parochialism and commercialism.

4. Augustine is quoting I John 2:16.

5. Wharton employs such martial metaphors when describing Undine's campaign to conquer Raymond de Chelles: "She knew the tone she had taken was virtually a *declaration of war*; but she was in a mood when the *act of defiance*, apart from its *strategic value*, was a satisfaction in itself. Moreover, if she could not gain her end without a *fight* it was better that the *battle should be engaged* while Raymond's ardour was at its height" (1985b, 893; emphasis mine).

6. Wharton's self-narrative presses a similar lesson: "When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate; and I should like to atone for my unappreciativeness by trying to revive that faint fragrance" (1990a, 780). The innate inquisitiveness that had enabled her to break out of the narrow orbit of her parents' world becomes a sin for which she must now "atone." Curiosity, Wharton argues in Burkean fashion, must be hemmed in and shown its proper place.

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7. Vance Weston, of *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and *The Gods Arrive* (1932), is almost alone among Wharton's protagonists in successfully reinventing himself, turning from an unlettered provincial to one of the East Coast literati.

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Reviews

Kafka and Wittgenstein: The Case for an Analytic Modernism, by Rebecca Schuman. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015. 220 pages.

Wittgenstein and Modernism, edited by Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 301 pages.

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A compelling case exists for reading literary modernism alongside the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The case in part is historical: the span of Wittgenstein's life (1889–1951) makes him a nearly exact contemporary of canonical modernists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce (both 1882–1941). Wittgenstein briefly joined—and then promptly quit—the same Cambridge intellectual society that counted among its members such Bloomsbury-affiliated figures as E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, and Woolf's husband Leonard. Scholars have often identified cosmopolitanism and global warfare as two key features of Western modernity; Wittgenstein was an Austrian native who lived much of his adult life in England, and who fought for the Austrian army on the front lines of World War I. But the case is also stylistic. Though Wittgenstein's thought has long been associated with logical positivism, it would be a mistake to assume that Wittgenstein shared the logical positivists' disdain for the literary, as Michael LeMahieu has shown.¹ In fact, Wittgenstein stipulated that “philosophy ought really to be written only as a poetic composition” ([1977] 1980, 24)² and wrote expressive, aphoristic remarks like, “What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” ([1953] 2009, 309). Such writing suggests an aesthetic sensibility closer to Friedrich Nietzsche's—and thus to that of modernism—than to the logical positivism of Rudolf Carnap.

Two recent books make significant contributions to the body of scholarship that reintegrates Wittgenstein into the literary and cultural contexts of his historical moment: *Kafka and Wittgenstein: The Case for an Analytic Modernism*, by Rebecca Schuman, and *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, edited by LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé. The collection includes essays from some of the most prominent scholars to

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have explored Wittgenstein's relations to aesthetic modernism (Marjorie Perloff, Charles Altieri, Allan Janik) and features exciting work from a number of additional voices. Both books are admirable testaments to what the academic community stands to gain from interdisciplinary scholarship on philosophy and literature: both books make ambitious, generally persuasive claims about how the two fields inform and clarify each other, while avoiding the temptation to ignore or elide important disciplinary distinctions between them.

Schuman begins with the epigraph Wittgenstein selected for his major late work, *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953), from a play by the nineteenth-century Viennese dramatist Johann Nestroy: "But overall, the thing about progress is that it always appears greater than it really is" (5). The line speaks to Wittgenstein's inclination to *dissolve*, rather than solve, philosophical problems; instead of offering new answers to questions that have traditionally preoccupied philosophers, Wittgenstein often suggests that such questions are not worth asking in the first place, since they rely on unclear or nonsensical uses of language. As he writes in the *Investigations*, "Where does this investigation get its importance from, given that it seems only to destroy everything interesting: that is, all that is great and important? . . . But what we are destroying are only houses of cards, and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stood" ([1953] 2009, 118). As Schuman shows, this impulse persists throughout Wittgenstein's career, despite significant methodological distinctions between the *Investigations* and his first work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (originally published in 1921). Bringing this Wittgensteinian perspective to bear on Kafka, Schuman finds that his works often mislead us into thinking we have made progress in understanding what they mean. In Schuman's view, "the important questions we attempt to answer—*Is Josef K. guilty?* . . . *What does Gregor Samsa's transformed body mean?* *Is Land Surveyor K. a real land surveyor or not?*—themselves presuppose a bigger delusion: that such questions can be asked in the first place" (5). As with Wittgenstein's work, this putatively destructive project turns out to have an important clarifying function. Schuman does more than simply identify faulty assumptions in previous readings of Kafka; she also provides her own compelling account of his distinctive investigations into the nature of language.

Her book is divided into two parts, reflecting the two phases of Wittgenstein's career: part 1 reads Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), *The*

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Metamorphosis (1915), and “The Judgment” (1913) in conversation with the *Tractatus*; part 2 reads *The Castle* (1926), “In the Penal Colony” (1919), and “Josefine the Singer” (1924) in conversation with the *Investigations*. Part 1 begins with a lengthy preface, in which Schuman makes a persuasive case for how and why the *Tractatus* serves as an illuminating lens through which to view Kafka’s fiction. This section is one of the highlights of her book, displaying a number of its greatest strengths. First, she provides a concise, remarkably lucid summary of the *Tractatus*—a model of how to introduce a challenging philosophical text to an audience of literary scholars. Next, she successfully positions both Wittgenstein and Kafka as responding to and inheriting the “language crisis . . . in Austrian modernism” (23). Writers like Karl Kraus and Fritz Mauthner, according to Schuman, promulgated the view that “all language is vulnerable to misuse and misunderstanding by its human purveyors” (23), and this attitude influenced the young Wittgenstein’s attempt “to delineate the limits of a logically ideal language” (7). She then shows how Kafka—born in 1883, six years before Wittgenstein—regularly grappled with his own version of this “linguistic skepticism” (23). In “On Parables” (1931), for instance, Kafka’s speaker writes, “Parables only want to say that the unreachable is unreachable, and we knew that already. But what we actually struggle with every day is other things” (quoted in Schuman, 30). This sentiment has clear resonances with the *Tractatus*’s project of distinguishing between sensical and nonsensical utterance.

Rather than simply treating the *Tractatus* as an object of aesthetic interest, Schuman takes seriously its contributions to “the New Logic” (40) of the period. This is what she means when she describes her book as making the case for “analytic modernism”: she recognizes that the *Tractatus* was a groundbreaking work in the analytic tradition, and she engages carefully with its claims to propound a system of formal logic. The merits of this innovative approach become clear when she turns to Kafka’s fiction. For instance, in her discussion of *The Trial*, she focuses on the role that contradictions play in Wittgenstein’s logical system: false under all possible conditions, contradictions are “without sense” (41) but not entirely nonsensical because they remain part of the logical symbolism the *Tractatus* sets up. On this basis, Schuman shows that the proceedings of Josef K.’s trial, though rife with contradiction, nonetheless adhere to laws of formal logic. This reading has consequences for how we treat the puzzling world of Kafka’s text: though K. does not operate

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within “a system in which he can be found guilty or not guilty” (42), this system retains internal validity, and thus we cannot describe it as “illogical” or “nonsensical” (51). Schuman’s reading of “The Judgment” is similarly incisive: informed by Wittgenstein’s comment near the end of the *Tractatus* that “ethics cannot be expressed” ([1922] 2007, 6.421), Schuman shows the impossibility of arriving at a sensible explanation for Georg Bendemann’s suicide.

Moving to Wittgenstein’s later work in part 2, Schuman helpfully characterizes the *Investigations* as revising and expanding upon the *Tractatus*, rather than rejecting it entirely: in both his earlier and later thought, she writes, Wittgenstein explores “the mystery of how our language works, and what it can and cannot do” (110). The difference is that with the *Investigations* Wittgenstein moves beyond his effort to delineate a rigid formal system and considers instead the “rough ground” ([1953] 2009, 107) of everyday usage. As Schuman notes in her chapter on *The Castle*, a major aim of the *Investigations* is to expose the problems with ostensive definition. On Wittgenstein’s account, the idea that words “name objects” (1) constitutes a deeply impoverished picture of how language works. Schuman reads *The Castle* as a Kafkaesque addition to Wittgenstein’s attack on ostension. Focusing on the novel’s strange depiction of K. as a “land surveyor” (in German, *Landvermesser*) who never actually does any land surveying, Schuman writes, “The chief problem in K.’s case is that while ‘Herr Landvermesser’ effectively becomes his name, at no point does anyone in the novel do what must be done to clarify what a *Landvermesser* actually is: explain it. Instead, we have one instance of so-called pure ostension after another, bare naming with no context” (120). The chapter demonstrates the advantages of reading Kafka and the *Investigations* together: by extensively dramatizing the problems with ostensive definition, *The Castle* “serves to make Wittgenstein’s point better than [Wittgenstein] himself did” (123), and Wittgenstein’s philosophy highlights the difficulties faced by an outsider like K. who seeks to navigate an unfamiliar set of language practices.

In her final chapters, Schuman explores two more of the *Investigations*’ key topics, which at once follow from and contribute to Wittgenstein’s attack on ostension: rule following and private language. She shows how Kafka bears out Wittgenstein’s suggestion that “it’s not possible to follow a rule ‘privately’” ([1953] 2009, 202), that one individual cannot unilaterally determine broader practices for how words work. Thus, with regard to

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"In the Penal Colony," Schuman argues that we should not assume (as readers often have) that the torture machine "malfunctions" (138) when it kills the officer at the end. For the story has offered us no evidence for how the machine works, apart from the officer's own words; the officer is "one man attempting to follow one rule once" (157). Rather than instantiating "correct" (144) usage, his descriptions may simply testify to his own isolation. As in earlier chapters, Schuman offers perceptive commentary on Kafka's fiction. As a reading of Wittgenstein, however, the final two chapters do not always match the achievement of the preceding ones. What makes Schuman's work on the early Wittgenstein so admirable is the deftness with which she negotiates between different interpretive positions, showing how one's reading of Kafka might alter depending on one's view of the *Tractatus*. By contrast, when she argues that the *Investigations*' discussion of rule following "dismantles the conceit of 'rules' entirely" (110), she deemphasizes the complexity of Wittgenstein's multi-vocal text, which rarely "dismantles" any position "entirely" so much as it articulates various, competing lines of thought and invites readers to investigate, for themselves, the extent to which these positions do or do not withstand scrutiny.

Schuman is hardly unique, among Wittgenstein scholars, in placing great weight upon the philosopher's discussion of rule following. Still, she might have addressed the influential line of Wittgenstein interpretation pioneered by Stanley Cavell, according to which "the ultimate appeal for Wittgenstein" ([1969] 2002, 50) is not rules but rather our "mutual attunement" ([1979] 1999, 168) with other human beings, our capacity to share "routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment" ([1969] 2002, 52). According to Cavell, this attunement—never guaranteed, always in danger of going awry—is what allows us to "communicate in language as rapidly and completely as we do" ([1979] 1999, 31). So when Schuman asks, following Saul Kripke, "How can we *prove* that we were ever 'really' following [a] rule . . . and not, instead, doing something else?" (159), Cavell might respond that we *cannot* prove such a thing, but that this inability does not, in many or most cases, prevent us from using words in shared ways.³ In light of how she reads the later Wittgenstein, Schuman concludes her book by suggesting that the *Investigations* foreshadows the radical linguistic skepticism of "deconstructionist criticism" (195)—a contention that, on a Cavellian reading, risks minimizing significant differences between

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these two schools of thought.⁴ Again, the claims about Kafka in part 2 of Schuman's book remain compelling in their own right, and attending to Cavell's reading would in no way have invalidated them. On the contrary, it is precisely because her analysis tends to be so insightful in the first place that it would have been illuminating to see her engage with a major interpretive position that presents some potential challenges to her own.

Another reason for introducing Cavell into discussions of Wittgenstein and modernism is that the former has characterized the latter as a "modernist" philosopher ([1969] 2002, xxxvi), someone who produces convention-defying work in response to the unique circumstances of modern life. This perspective on Wittgenstein's modernism informs many of the essays in LeMahieu and Zumhagen-Yekplé's collection. For instance—to remain with Kafka for a moment—Yi-Ping Ong offers a reading of Kafka's fiction informed by Cavell and largely compatible with the terms Schuman puts forward. Ong compares Wittgenstein's "A Lecture on Ethics" (1929) to Kafka's "A Report for an Academy" (1917), showing how each text portrays the attempt to speak ethically as "a drama of cagedness" (207). Just as Wittgenstein professes that giving a lecture on ethics involves "run[ning] against the boundaries of language[,] . . . against the walls of our cage" (quoted in Ong 211), so Kafka's Red Peter—an ape who has learned to live as a human—informs his listeners that he is no longer in a position to speak about "his former apish life" (225). Like Wittgenstein, Red Peter subverts the expectations of his audience; instead of augmenting their "*human knowledge of apehood*," he displays his own "*apish knowledge of humanity*"—a "reversal" that, Ong writes, "captures" his audience, forcing them to confront" (226) the question of whether they will acknowledge Red Peter as a member of their community. Ong's eloquent meditation on the possibilities of ethical and ontological knowledge provides one of the highlights of the collection, and it also bolsters Schuman's claims about the depth of affinity between these two modernists.

Taken together, the essays in *Wittgenstein and Modernism* offer a range of perspectives on the philosopher's work and ways of considering it in the context of modernism. The collection is divided into three sections: "Wittgenstein's Modernist Context," "Wittgenstein's Modernist Cultures," and "Wittgenstein and Literary Modernism." These categories should be understood as having what Wittgenstein would call "blurred" rather than "sharp" edges ([1953] 2009, 71). As LeMahieu and Zumhagen-

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Yekplé write in their introduction, “The chapters in this volume form a kind of continuum with slight yet constantly varying thematic overlap as the volume progresses” (19). The editors also note that the volume “interprets modernism as referring more broadly to modernist cultural production” (8). Thus, Eli Friedlander discusses the “pure realism” of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein [1922] 2007, 5.64) alongside Walter Benjamin’s views on photography; Marjorie Perloff traces Wittgenstein’s relationship to Christianity; Janik shows how the architect Adolf Loos informed Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophical “craftsmanship” (72); and Piergiorgio Donatelli identifies both Loos and Robert Musil as influences on Wittgenstein’s critique of modern culture. Altieri and John Gibson offer broader theoretical reflections on how Wittgenstein enables new ways of approaching and understanding literature. Other contributors join Ong in providing sustained readings of specific literary texts: Kristin Boyce on Henry James’s *The Sacred Fount* (1901); Zumhagen-Yekplé on the “Ithaca” chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922); and LeMahieu on Saul Bellow’s early novels, particularly *Dangling Man* (1944). Anthony Cascardi’s essay does a bit of everything, invoking Woolf, Samuel Beckett, and Gertrude Stein as part of a meditation on the philosophical concept of “experience” (30) and the trajectory of Wittgenstein’s career.

The strongest contributions to the collection tend to be those that use the Wittgenstein-modernism pairing as a staging ground for broader reflections on the ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature. Gibson’s essay is exemplary in this regard. Invoking Wallace Stevens’s so-called philosophical poetry as illustrative of his larger claims, Gibson argues that to call a poem’s content “philosophical” is to privilege the project of philosophy over that of poetry. Instead, he writes, we should treat poetry and philosophy as each taking up, in its own way, “a shared sense of worries, wonders, anxieties, and puzzles” (148). “Wittgenstein’s reformed vision of philosophy” helps us see that Stevens’s poetry does not “perfect philosophy’s project” (148) so much as it offers “an alternative to philosophy itself, another way of working through the same cultural material” (149). Boyce makes similarly far-reaching claims about the relationship between the two disciplines. She writes that “literature and philosophy exist in a reciprocal relation of mutual dependence”: on the one hand, “each serv[es] as an enabling condition that helps the other continue”; on the other hand, each “constitutes for the other a condition *suffered*, one from which recovery is needed” (155). Thus, she argues

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(following Cavell) that Wittgenstein's philosophical claims have much in common with aesthetic judgments, even as the discipline of philosophy has often worried that it "might degenerate into something . . . indistinguishable from rhetoric, . . . working on the emotions instead of appealing to reason" (164). Analogously, Boyce shows through her reading of *The Sacred Fount* that the quest for "self-knowledge" is at once an important feature of literature's project and a potential threat (173), given the possibility that introspection might become "*chronic*," or "an all-encompassing preoccupation that drains the vitality of those who are caught up in it" (174).

In the opening paragraph of their introduction, the editors write that Wittgenstein's thought sheds light on "modernism as a historical period, an aesthetic style, and a philosophical worldview" (1). While the essays in the collection yield admirable insights into the latter two terms, I would have liked to hear more about the first. That is to say, by offering readers so many intelligent discussions of philosophical and aesthetic modernism, the collection risks losing sight of the significant historical developments that occur between, say, 1911—the year Wittgenstein began formally studying philosophy at Cambridge—and 1951—the year he died. The introduction helpfully identifies "transformation" as among the volume's key concepts, but in context the term tends to be synonymous with "self-transformation" (3) rather than evoking the major economic and social shifts of the period. Are there ways, we might ask, in which historical change produced changes in Wittgenstein's philosophy? Are there ways in which his gnomic remarks obliquely register and comment on the disorienting events of his age?⁵ Wittgenstein was, after all, a native German speaker of Jewish ancestry who lamented "the darkness of this time" in his preface to the *Investigations*, written in 1945 ([1953] 2009, 4); how might this kind of comment testify to the historically situated nature of his modernism?

Still, even if these questions are not fully answered, our ability to formulate them at all speaks to the success of LeMahieu and Zumhagen-Yekplé's collection, which forcefully establishes the topic of Wittgenstein and modernism as deserving of further investigation. Like Schuman, the contributors to *Wittgenstein and Modernism* have done essential work to map the contours of this interdisciplinary subfield and to carry forward a critical discussion in which, one suspects, there remains a great deal to say.



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Notes

1. For the fullest version of this argument, see LeMahieu’s monograph, *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945–1975* (2013).
2. Citations from Wittgenstein, with the exception of his preface to the *Investigations*, refer to section numbers.
3. For Cavell’s response to Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein, see Cavell 1990, 64–100.
4. For a Cavell-informed perspective on the relationship between deconstruction and the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, see Moi 2009.
5. One essay that considers such questions is Marjorie Perloff’s, which includes a discussion of how Wittgenstein’s World War I experience altered the final shape of the *Tractatus*. Perloff’s claims may already be familiar to some readers, since a version of this essay constitutes the conclusion to her recent monograph, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (2016).

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Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film, by Phyllis Lassner. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 272 pages.

Mark David Kaufman

The English writer Graham Greene famously grouped his early fiction into two categories: “novels” and “entertainments.” He reserved the first designation for books he judged to be serious works of literature, contemplative Catholic novels like *The Power and the Glory* (1940). The second category included escapist narratives, spy thrillers such as *The Ministry of Fear* (1943). Greene eventually abandoned this distinction, realizing perhaps that his best books troubled easy categorization, but a similar dichotomy has stigmatized modern spy fiction since its inception at the turn of the twentieth century, and the genre has been relegated to (at best) the ranks of the middlebrow and largely excluded from academic discourse. When full-length treatments of espionage fiction began to appear in the last quarter of the last century, they tended to offer themselves either as genre studies, thereby reinforcing old hierarchies of literary value, or as theory-driven assaults on the very division between so-called high and popular forms of art.

Happily, literary critics today no longer feel obliged to justify or defend their interest in spy stories and thrillers, and the twenty-first century has seen a number of significant contributions to the field, including Allan Hepburn’s *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005), Timothy Melley’s *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (2012), and Erin G. Carlston’s *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens* (2013). What unites these, as well as the two studies under review, is a refusal to treat spy fiction as a genre in a vacuum, as an escapist medium divorced from the concerns of the “real world”; rather, contemporary critics recognize that espionage narratives have something important to say (and show) about culture, history, politics, race, gender, sexuality, and the experience of modernity in general.

Oliver S. Buckton’s *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900* is an ambitious and comprehensive analysis of the most significant spy

novels and movies of the last century. Subtitled *The Changing Enemy*, Buckton's study traces how espionage fiction both registers and shapes our conception of the hostile other, from German invaders in the years leading up to the First World War to Islamic extremists in our own time. Phyllis Lassner's *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* focuses on how espionage narratives from the 1930s through the Cold War respond to the threat of authoritarianism and bear witness to the moral and ethical dilemmas arising from war and displacement. Writing against Michael Denning's claim that the political content of espionage fiction is simply a "cover story" for formulaic adventure plots (1987, 2), Lassner, like Buckton, argues that spy novels and films both complement and challenge supposedly objective, journalistic accounts of current events. In our era of "alternative facts," these studies offer insight into other ways that fiction plays a role in shaping public opinion and national policy.

The "spy story," Buckton observes, "has long served as a significant barometer of the political attitudes and, at times, contradictory cultural assumptions in Britain and, indeed, many other parts of the world" (xii). More specifically, he argues that spy fiction (including cinema and television) mediates a nation's perception of the "enemy" at any given period. Through a process of "faction"—a term Buckton borrows and adapts from historian Nigel West (2004, 122)—espionage narratives "interweave sometimes far-fetched plots together with contemporary political realities to create compelling stories and dynamic protagonists, such that the reader cannot always discern what has been invented and what taken from the headlines" (xiii). Consequently, our understanding of international relations, global conflicts, and competing ideologies is, to some degree, a product of fantasy. In advancing this claim, Buckton's book intersects with Timothy Melley's study of the "covert sphere," which the latter defines as "the cultural imaginary shaped by both institutional secrecy and public fascination with the secret work of the state" (2012, 5). If intelligence agencies are, by their very nature, secret, the covert sphere, which includes novels, comics, movies, and video games, fills the information gap and provides a necessary "theater for the deliberation of clandestine policy from the Cold War to the present." While Melley deals mostly with contemporary culture, Buckton illustrates how espionage fantasies have performed a similar function since at least the late nineteenth century, adapting to—and sometimes constructing—the "changing enemy" both at home and abroad.

Coming from a background in Victorian studies, Buckton begins by situating West's concept of "faction" in the imperial adventure fiction of H. Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling. These writers, Buckton emphasizes, incorporated references to historical events and actual people alongside invented characters and situations. A progenitor of the modern spy novel, Kipling's *Kim* (1901), for instance, is set in the midst of the "Great Game," the real-life conflict between British India and imperial Russia. While Kipling's novel paved the way for the heroic spy yarns of John Buchan and Ian Fleming, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) took a darker, more ironic approach. Shifting the enemy to the domestic sphere (London), Conrad's novel plays on contemporary fears of foreign agents and anticipates later concerns over terrorism. The book is also, Buckton acknowledges, "the precursor of the morally ambivalent and politically complex spy fiction" (8-9) of Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, and John le Carré. For these novelists, allies and enemies are no longer separate and distinct categories; they collide and overlap in a world of "moral uncertainty" (10). In postwar espionage fiction, for instance, the "alternation between Nazi Germany, Russia, and East Germany as the site of the enemy is arguably less significant . . . than the change of focus to corruption within Western intelligence organizations themselves" (22). Revelations concerning traitors within the British establishment—namely, the defections of Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, and Kim Philby—and the growing suspicion that it was impossible for a nation to "win" the Cold War without compromising its values and ethics prompted le Carré and others to represent the spy world unromantically and unsympathetically.

At the same time, Buckton is interested in how certain character archetypes in spy fiction develop and evolve in response to changing political climates. His approach is therefore simultaneously historicist and formalist; each chapter focuses on a particular paradigm, which he traces through its various incarnations over the decades. These include the accidental spy, the spy who knew too much, the professional spy, the double agent, the spy villain, and the spymaster. One conclusion we might draw from this approach is that while the specific political contexts have shifted over the years, the range of protagonists in espionage literature and film have remained remarkably consistent, even if certain types flourish more than others at a given moment. Buckton characterizes the accidental spy, for instance, as an amateur with "no special training or even inclination for espionage and counterespionage" (33). This type of spy enters the world

of espionage haphazardly but then rises to the occasion when it becomes clear that the country's interests and safety are at stake. John Buchan's Richard Hannay, first introduced in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), is a well-known example of this type, but the accidental spy also features in the prolific work of William Le Queux, whose alarmist fantasies, especially *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) and *Spies of the Kaiser* (1909), played a role in nudging Britain toward the creation of the first modern intelligence agency.

Over the years, however, the fortunes of the accidental spy have wavered with the introduction of new adversaries and the rise of the national security state. In postwar fiction, the figure has largely been displaced by what Buckton calls the professional spy, the career agent who inhabits a world of official (albeit clandestine) intelligence agencies and government departments. The professional spy is first and foremost a creature of the Cold War, a product of both the normalization and bureaucratization of espionage, especially as represented by the CIA, the dominant force in the Western intelligence community after the Second World War. The era's most famous Cold Warrior—James Bond—is, in Buckton's view, a response to Britain's loss of global hegemony; while turn-of-the-century spy novelists played on national anxieties and fears of invasion, "Fleming offered Bond as a compensatory fantasy for Britain's actual decline—especially in comparison with the US—in the postwar era" (123). Buckton points out that Bond's CIA friend, Felix Leiter, always plays second fiddle to the SIS agent. But for all his compensatory fantasies and wish fulfillments, 007 emerges as a more complex figure than we might expect. Buckton reveals the character's contradictions: "Bond, besides being a spy, is a man in revolt against the conventions of polite modern bourgeois society" (125), the society he risks his life to protect. Paradoxically, the agent is likewise "permitted to pursue a range of anti-social activities (violence, betrayal, deception, sexual manipulation, theft, to name a few) for the ultimate purpose of protecting the social order." Here, Buckton locates in Fleming one of the many hypocrisies that underlie national security, the sort of double bind that le Carré—who called Bond "the ultimate prostitute" (quoted in Buckton, 123)—makes the subject of tragedy in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963).

Similarly, Phyllis Lassner's *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* treats the spy story both as a barometer and a call to conscience, a genre that intervenes in political and historical

discourse, transcending its status as mere “entertainment.” But while Buckton’s book takes the form of a comprehensive survey, Lassner’s analysis concentrates on how spy literature and cinema from the 1930s to the 1960s address the menace of totalitarianism and reveal the plight of the exile. More specifically, she limits her study to six writers: Eric Ambler, Pamela Frankau, Helen MacInnes, Ann Bridge, Leslie Howard, and John le Carré. Representing both canonical and lesser-known authors of the period—including women writers, a group that is more or less absent from Buckton’s discussion—each of these artists practices some form of “faction.” That is to say, their work “fuse[s] context and content, representing contemporaneous international crises as the foundation of plots, characters, imaginative analysis, and polemical positions” (3). As David Trotter observes, the early hero of the thriller, the amateur or accidental spy, tended to be a “sleepy young Englishman whose lassitude and political complacency are shattered when he stumbles across some fiendish plot” (quoted in Buckton, 33). Lassner shifts this dynamic to the *reader*, whose indifference to suffering and injustice—an indifference fostered by Western politicians and diplomats who choose to turn a blind eye—is challenged not only by novels but also by films and radio broadcasts that invite their audiences to empathize with the victims of racism and authoritarian aggression.

Lassner begins her chronological study with a chapter on Eric Ambler, whose late 1930s spy novels register the fears, anxieties, and uncertainties of the interwar period. Like Buckton, she recognizes that Ambler’s fiction serves as a critique of capitalism, but she also emphasizes that his work is simultaneously a response to Nazism, even going so far as to characterize it as “anti-Fascist propaganda” (53). From this perspective, the quality of statelessness in his characters, which Buckton associates with the writer’s leftist politics, comes to signify a more specific condition of exile; Ambler’s characters are nationless because they have been displaced by the growing tide of totalitarianism. His protagonists, moreover, are never far from antagonists; they are not heroes but “bystander[s] . . . whose uncommitted position threatens to become complicit with fascist practices” (20). Through such characters, Ambler is able to condemn Britain’s—indeed, all Western democracies’—ambivalence toward fascism and its victims. His ultimate goal, in Lassner’s view, is to “dramatise a polemical call to feel anxiety as a precursor to political activism” (22). In her discussion, Lassner develops an illuminating parallel between spy fiction and German

Expressionism, especially in its Gothic cinematic form. Evoking such films as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *Metropolis* (1927), Ambler's "[circuitous] train journeys, undulating streets, buildings and rooms and dank, blind and twisted passageways signify the autocratic policies of fascistic greed, the flaccid politics of confused, drifting and paralysed national perspectives as well as political ignorance and indifference" (23). Lassner frames this expressionistic aesthetic as a reaction against realism, which she aligns with a naive political perspective. This position is dramatized in *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944), which follows a mystery writer, Charles Latimer, who is investigating the life and death of an international criminal. In the course of his investigation, the writer learns that Dimitrios is not only not dead but that his entire investigation—what Lassner calls his "search for character and plot" (55)—is unsubstantiated as realistic inquiry. Dimitrios, for his part, remains a mysterious and indeterminate figure, a kind of vampire, a stateless menace who "represents the horrific embodiment of a parasitic, fascistic drive in the inter-war period that sucks the blood of nations, threatening them with infectious addictions to destructive power" (27).

Like Ambler, the subjects of Lassner's second chapter—MacInnes, Bridge, and Frankau—employ expressionistic techniques to question and problematize the West's assumed ethical and moral superiority over Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. But unlike canonical spy novelists, these authors focus on female protagonists, amateurs who nevertheless "make deliberate choices to become secret operatives based on political convictions" (70). In opposition to spy stories that involve violent clashes, chase sequences, and other conventions of the genre, these writers "reconfigure suspense as the development of individual agency." The title of the chapter, "Double Agency," refers to the female spy's—and, by implication, the writer's—"revisionist" perspective; they "exile themselves from the domestic sphere and their private roles," thereby "occup[ying] a challenging narrative space that questions and revises distinctions between home front and battleground, and between exile and espionage as action, state of being and gendered identity." For example, MacInnes's first novel, *Above Suspicion* (1941), features a married couple from Oxford who travel to Germany on a secret mission. While the academic husband, Richard, is something of a bumbling amateur, the wife, Frances, provides the novel's true intellectual perspective by critically examining fascist ideology. Through her, MacInnes stages "the transformation of women's social and

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economic security into political consciousness” while simultaneously “criticis[es] privileged isolationism” (82). Bridge’s *A Place to Stand* (1953) also calls attention to the dangers of remaining blind to violence and injustice, but it does so through a narrative that displaces both character and reader in time, thereby disrupting the conventional spy thriller’s linear trajectory and comforting resolution. Set in Budapest in 1941, the novel offers a proleptic commentary on both Nazi and Soviet atrocities by focusing on a young American woman, Hope Kirkland, who becomes involved with Polish refugees. In her analysis, Lassner discusses how the “hope” (96) embodied by the Western protagonist is ironically undermined by the future history available to the novel’s readers in 1953—a perspective marked by knowledge of the Holocaust and Stalin’s genocides.

Before moving on to the Cold War, Lassner includes a chapter on the British actor, writer, and broadcaster, Leslie Howard. Coming from a Hungarian Jewish background, Howard spent the early years of the Second World War (until his untimely death in 1943) creating films, articles, and radio programs aimed at both bringing the United States into the Allied fold and giving voice to the victims of Nazi aggression. His innovation was to merge entertainment and propaganda, primarily by “combining such elements of popular culture as comic and irreverent jokes, melodrama, and romance with testimonies and depictions of exile, loss, and irreversible discontinuity and disorientation” (124). The chapter is unique in that it opens the field of spy discourse to include not only books and films but also Howard’s radio scripts, which he wrote to counter the pro-Nazi broadcasts of the British traitor William Joyce (aka “Lord Haw Haw”). Sponsored by the Ministry of Information, his broadcasts sought to foster sympathy for European victims of Nazism. In “About Home” (1940), for example, he emphasizes that the real victim of war is the family, and he illustrates this by comparing Britons displaced by the Blitz to Poles who have been forced out of their homes in the midst of winter (see Lassner 129). Although the radio scripts Lassner discusses do not overtly concern espionage, they inform Howard’s subsequent film work, such as *Pimpernel Smith* (1941), a thriller that uses comedy to undermine Nazi ideology and encourage viewers to identify with individuals struggling against fascism.

Unlike Howard’s wartime propaganda, the Cold War novels of John le Carré constitute not so much a call to arms as an interrogation of privileged ideologies and historical narratives. Le Carré’s “memory work,” which Lassner aligns with the revisionary perspectives of Bridge and

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Frankau, “does not serve a mimetic function”; rather, his novels question the received narrative of the West’s victory over fascism by “disrupt[ing] temporal linearity, points of view and the comforts of plot-driven resolution” (5). In the world of le Carré, the Second World War was less a victory than a hypocritical compromise, a Faustian bargain between Western democracies and the tatters of Nazi Germany, whose surviving fascists then became uneasy allies in the struggle against the Soviet Union. Accordingly, his spy fiction offers “a dystopian warning that the sacrifices demanded by political ideology erase historical memory” (166). This is the lesson of le Carré’s third novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), in which Alec Leamas learns too late that his mission in East Germany has been a ruse and that his real purpose is to provide cover for a murderous former Nazi who is now a double agent working for Britain. The operation results in the death of two Jews: Fiedler, an East German intelligence officer, and Liz Gold, Leamas’s lover, who has been brought over as part of the deception and is shot, along with Leamas himself, while attempting to scale the Berlin Wall. The novel’s famous ending epitomizes for Lassner a condition of moral and political exile; the wall, a kind of reborn concentration camp, is a stateless zone, a no-man’s land where the ideologies of East and West combine in a Gothic Expressionistic nightmare. “Both sides of the wall,” she observes, “are dystopian homes to the villains and victims of state-sponsored betrayal” (203).

Buckton and Lassner each make important contributions to our understanding of how spy fiction not only depicts the “enemy” but also productively intervenes in political discourse. Today, as we grapple with the phenomenon of “fake news” and competing narratives of nation and race, we do well to recognize that fiction has another kind of agency: it has the power to appeal to the ethical imagination, to help us identify with the refugee, to instill in us a desire for justice. And the stakes have never been higher. At one point in her study, Lassner makes what seems now a chilling observation: these writers, she says, “express fears that the equalities promised by Allied victory may never be safe from the lures of anti-democratic supremacy. Their espionage parables question whether the disguised presence of Fascist power isn’t the double agent, the mole deep in the myth of a victorious democracy” (112-13). If spy fiction in the post-Cold War era has, as Buckton discusses at the end of his book, evolved to take on the threat posed by international terrorism, perhaps its future lies in its potential to counter the menace of a resurgent authoritarianism at home.



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Postmodern/Postwar—And After: Rethinking American Literature, edited by Jason Gladstone, Andrew Hoberek, and Daniel Worden. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. 258 pages.

Joseph Conte

The architectural theorist Charles Jencks asserts that, as art movements go, postmodernism (or “the Post-Modern,” in his rendering) has at fifty years in the making been considerably longer lived than modernist avant-garde movements such as vorticism, futurism, or surrealism. As an aesthetics, or even as a dominant cultural order, the postmodern has “become a transhistorical concept” (Jencks 2011, 8) like the baroque or romanticism. Jencks is not making a subtle distinction here between architectural history and cultural politics. In a field in which edifices rise and, then, after a period of time, may be demolished, a historical period will have its tombstone markers of birth and death: for example, Frank Lloyd Wright’s 1906 Larkin Administration Building in Buffalo, New York, the epitome of the modern(ist) office complex, was razed for a parking lot in 1950; and the implosion of the Pruitt-Igoe high-rise urban housing project in St. Louis signaled, for Jencks, what Brian McHale calls the “onset” (60) of the postmodern in 1972. But if the postmodernism we know was more than a movement in the arts and culture (certainly not limited to, or even predominantly, a force in literary formations), its reputation rests on whether it has effectively, or affectively, changed the culture. The fact that postmodern architecture “borrows” from earlier periods, which constitutes its eclecticism, suggests for Jencks that a transhistorical aesthetics defines postmodernism, represented by its reflexivity, blatant artifice, irony, plagiarism, pastiche, pluralism, hybridity, double coding, hi/lo cultural blending, and other characteristics.

The editors of *Postmodern/Postwar—And After*, Jason Gladstone, Andrew Hoberek, and Daniel Worden, productively ask whether the movement we have called postmodernism is indeed over and, if so, what is the “something else” that follows it. But before they turn to a conversation on literary succession, they pose a more controversial question as to whether postmodernism was ever the dominant artistic order after 1945. They begin their “rethinking” of the period by invoking the “increasing number of critics” who have “begun to question whether postmodernism

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was ever a significant aspect of postwar American literary culture" (1–2). If not, then perhaps we've been enjoying "something else" all along. They regard the proliferation of alternative periodizing terms proposed in post-1945 literary studies as a rationale for their reconsideration. Most prominent is the postwar as a historical period (effectively 1945–89), defined by the political aesthetics of the Cold War, or even a protracted "interwar" (167), as proposed by contributor Paul K. Saint-Amour, with the nuclear detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the post-9/11 "war on terror" as its bracketing historical events. Amy Hungerford (2008) has suggested that we have all been in the continuous present of the contemporary, but as contributor Amy J. Elias observes, unlike the "contemporaries" (32) of the past, the critical establishment in such journals as *Contemporary Literature* or *boundary 2* ushered in the academic study of recent and living authors. The "reconfigured field" of our time has thus offered up a growing number of periodizing terms, including Christian Moraru's "cosmodernism" (2011), "exomodern," "neoliberal," and "post-9/11" (2), along with such monikers as "digimodernism . . . the New Sincerity, Remodernism, planetarity, performatism, geoculture, transculturalism, neocosmopolitanism, network society" (33), most of which fall into the "and after" category. We may have always been contemporary, but perhaps we have never been postmodern.

Simplifying their findings to a degree, the editors argue that there are "two camps in recent scholarship on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature and culture. On the one hand, postmodernism still retains the explanatory force that it once did for scholars who draw heavily on theory and who look to literature for moments of disruption, resistance, and utopian imagining. On the other hand, postmodernism is reduced or abandoned by critics who turn to institutional histories of post-1945 literature and who see in that literature continuity with, and the institutionalization of, modernism" (14). This dichotomy is familiar from debates on the meaning of *post* in the periodizing term as signifying either a "break" from or "continuity" with modernism. Making the case for a postmodernism of "rupture," Fredric Jameson declares that "the postmodern looks for breaks . . . for the telltale instant after which [the world] is no longer the same" (1991, ix), and he associates the disruptive postmodern aesthetic, in the work of artists such as John Cage, John Ashbery, Robert Wilson, Ishmael Reed, Michael Snow, and Andy Warhol, with schizophrenia, following Lacan, "as a breakdown in the signifying

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chain . . . [into] a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (26). Other studies, however, emphasize the continuing influence of high-modernist predecessors on contemporary writers (or "cultural belatedness," in Harold Bloom's theory of *The Anxiety of Influence* [1997, xxv]), so that in Ann Keniston's *Ghostly Figures: Memory and Belatedness in Postwar American Poetry* (2015), poets such as Adrienne Rich, Mark Doty, James Merrill, and Jorie Graham remain inescapably the pale epigoni of T. S. Eliot or Wallace Stevens; or, in Jeremy Green's *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (2005), novelists such as John Barth, Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, and Jonathan Franzen are the forever late followers of James Joyce or William Faulkner.

Drawing on a special double issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, "Postmodernism, Then" (2011), the editors have sought not so much to reconcile the competing terms and periodicities of post-1945 American literature as to set the scholars into conversation. Recognizing that the participants represent "overlapping, yet also divergent" views, the volume comprises four sections in different formats: a dialogue on the field of postmodern, postwar, and contemporary literary studies; a set of reflective essays on the "postmodern revisited"; another set on the "postwar reconfigured"; and, finally, a grouping of shorter, necessarily more diverse position papers on "what comes after." As an editorial strategy, this Venn diagram of overlapping yet divergent sets of papers places in relief such critical concepts as break, sincerity, irony, formalism, and historicism but also risks complication when conflicting values are attributed to postmodernism; for example, postmodernism was resistant to politics (217), but it expresses a politics of resistance to the world-system (14).

Given the diversity of positions expressed by the twenty-two contributors to *Postmodern/Postwar—And After*, it would be impossible to synthesize an overall argument for the volume other than that the editors seem to favor the second "camp" of scholarship that emphasizes the continuity of post-1945 literature with modernism. I'll try instead to single out a few of the operative concepts that the contributors advance and intervene in their conversation, which is an appealing aspect of the book. In the section on the "postmodern revisited," Brian McHale's contribution, "Break, Period, Interregnum," makes the case for postmodernism as a period in literary history that should be distinguished from modernism. McHale has argued elsewhere that while modernism is captivated by an "epistemological dominant," postmodernism is formulated

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according to an “ontological dominant” (1987, 10). Here he invokes Jameson on the dialectics between the break and the period, concluding: “Bring enough reflective pressure to bear on a period, and it begins to look like a break; squint intently enough at a break, and it begins to look like a period” (59). This “thought experiment,” like Schrödinger’s cat that is simultaneously alive and dead in a quantum universe, suggests that postmodernism can be at once continuous with and disengaged from modernism. Opting for a break rather than the blander continuities of postwar or contemporary, McHale asserts that depending on the “particular onset date or threshold moment” (60) one chooses, one tells a different “cultural-historical narrative” of postmodernity. Unlike Jencks, who dates the postmodern break with the literal collapse of the high-modernist international style of architecture in 1972, McHale chooses to date the “onset” of postmodernism to 1966, a year in which the postwar avant-garde achieves critical mass, the revolutionary politics of feminism, black separatism, and antiwar protest escalate, and Thomas Pynchon publishes *The Crying of Lot 49*, “the text that marks the frontier between modernism and postmodernism” (62). He then describes a “peak” (64) phase from the publication of *Gravity’s Rainbow* in 1973 through the late eighties, characterized by the prominence of “megafictions” such as Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren* (1974), the “historiographic metafiction” (in Linda Hutcheon’s coinage [1988, 105]) of E. L. Doctorow and John Fowles, and the “cerebral genre novels” of Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Margaret Atwood, and Umberto Eco. The third threshold of postmodernism, the “interregnum” (65), occurs in 1989–90 with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the incipient dissolution of the Soviet Union. Whether this phase marks a “late” form of postmodernism (Green 2005), cosmopolitanism, a “form of modernism in which modernity’s imperialist rationality gives way to a planetary *relationality*” (65), or “post-postmodernism” (66), McHale describes a shift from the “dualistic or Manichean world-view of the Cold War” to a “vision of multipolarity, or even *apolarity*.” McHale’s narrative of the three phases of postmodernism, then, argues not only for a cultural-historical break with modernism but also for a timetable divergent from that of postwar geopolitics.

Two essays by Daniel Grausam and Paul K. Saint-Amour in the section “The Postwar Reconfigured” provide a counterpoint to McHale’s historicism. Grausam’s “Cold War, Post-Cold War” suggests, at the very least, a parallax relation between the Cold War and postmodern culture.

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In Grausam's argument, the postmodern aesthetic of the 1960s is heavily inflected by what Alan Nadel (1995) has called nuclear "containment culture" (quoted on 142) and the residual paranoia of McCarthyism. Grausam observes that the end of the Cold War, by 1991, more or less coincides with the obsolescence of postmodernism: "A recognizable cultural aesthetic seemed to be crumbling at about the same time as both a famous wall and a union of Socialist Republics." But rather than declare that the cultural and political epochs had yielded, as the Monty Python troupe announced, to "something completely different," Grausam asks what the concept of the Cold War can bring to the periodizing term *after*: "What does it tell us about what comes 'after' the postmodern, 'after' the postwar?" (143). Among the several literary examples in which the "continuing influence of the Cold War" lingers like a case of low-dose radiation sickness is David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), set in a near-future superstate in which Hal Incandenza contends with the suicide of his father, an experimental, postmodern filmmaker, and participates in a war game called "Eschaton" (the end of the world), a modified form of high-lob tennis. In William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), the first novel to refer explicitly to 9/11, Win Pollard, the father of branding adept Cayce, is a Cold War security expert for the CIA who goes missing in the vicinity of the World Trade Center on the morning of the attack. The twentieth-century dualism of spy vs. spy is caught unprepared by global terrorism, while Pollard's progeny Cayce becomes enmeshed in multinational corporate espionage. Grausam then turns to DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), which begins with the "shot heard round the world" on October 3, 1951—the game-winning home run by Bobby Thomson of the New York Giants over the Brooklyn Dodgers but also "the triumph of death" as the *New York Times* reports the Soviet Union's successful nuclear tests—the "onset" of the Cold War. While this "megafiction" novel "concerns the complex phenomenology of life under the shadow of the bomb" (145–46), its final section, "Das Kapital," offers a "doubled history" in which the genetic damage from nuclear waste (and accidents such as Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, and, later, Fukushima) persists alongside the wastage of "neoliberal globalization" (146).

Perhaps with a clean break there comes clarity, the sense that, for better or worse, everything has changed. But Saint-Amour's contribution, "Perpetual Interwar," argues that "modern war and war powers have historically proven to be not punctual but durable, not exceptional but

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perpetual in their drift" (167). Notwithstanding George W. Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, the United States is now in its sixteenth year of the war on terror in Afghanistan and around the globe. If we consider "the term 'interwar'" not as a bracketed historical period but "phenomenologically—as the real-time experience of remembering a past war while awaiting a future one that may or may not arrive," then "we begin to see how a period could go on, even in near perpetuity, feeling like an interwar era as long as another war appeared to loom" (167–68). In terms of literary history, Saint-Amour makes the claim that "a range of post-1945 works, including but not limited to some of the historiographic metafiction that were cornerstones of 'the old postmodernism,' themselves engage in *theorizing* a transperiod approach to later modernity by means of something like a perpetual interwar" (169). He offers as an example Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel whose noted punctuality at the close of World War II is nevertheless laced with creative anachronism, "a transperiod work in period camouflage" (173).

The final section of shorter position papers offers a variety of alternatives to "what comes after" postmodernism. Among the seven proposals, the advancement of "digitalism" (214) by N. Katherine Hayles—otherwise described as network culture or posthumanism—seems likely to dominate our appreciation of twenty-first-century literary culture. Hayles summarizes her important arguments in books on electronic literature and digital media in this brief article, in which she contends that "at every stage of the production and consumption of contemporary literature, digital media are transforming the functions of writers, readers, publishers, printers, distributors, and booksellers" (209). As transformative as the Chinese invention of paper or the Gutenberg press, digital media has spawned a host of interactive literary forms on multiple platforms, including hypertext, transmedial literature, network fiction, computer-generated "flarf" poetry, and so called locative works for smartphones. While the "late age of print" may yet turn out to be the great age of digital literature, the Amazon Kindle and other e-readers threaten to do to the diversity of innovative electronic literature what the company's online retailing did to brick-and-mortar booksellers and the publishing industry, resulting in a monoculture of conventional narrative fiction and nonfiction for the tablet rather than the codex. Similarly, social media may have already disabled our attention spans for long-form

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reading. Adam Kelly holds forth on “the new sincerity” as a post-baby-boom generation of writers including David Foster Wallace, Jennifer Egan, Dave Eggers, Dana Spiotta, and Colson Whitehead opt for authenticity rather than artifice, frankness rather than irony. Whether such sincerity becomes the representative style of post-postmodernism depends on a collective and non-naïve appreciation for “intersubjective truth” (199) and interpersonal affect, or on whether we can, as Eggers urges, “stay human” in a posthuman age. Finally, Ursula K. Heise offers an ecological counterpoint to the accelerated “future shock” of cultural change. Climate scientists and environmentalists have “declared a new geological age, the Anthropocene, that putatively started around two hundred years ago—an age in which human impact itself has become the dominant shaping force on the planet” (253). Perhaps there should be a “Slow Lit” movement that emphasizes quality, craftsmanship, and undivided attention in an era of speed, mutability, and distraction. She asks whether ecocritical activists should consider “what the appropriate response is to the slowness of natural processes and the accelerated rhythms of global modernity—or is it the rapidity of ecological transformations and the foot-dragging response of political actors” (254), more so now that the United States has summarily withdrawn from the Paris climate accord. But just as McHale is reported to have wondered “whether we defined ‘postmodernism’ too soon” (31), it may be too soon to theorize what comes after. *Postmodern/Postwar—And After* argues persuasively that we are no longer postmodern, but the nearly two dozen contending voices in this volume fail to identify, as McHale once did in *Postmodernist Fiction*, what the dominant of a twenty-first-century literature will be. If not an epistemological or ontological dominant, then, the early millennial scene may be a phenomenological one of *affect* that revitalizes the cosmopolitan, holistic, empathic, organic, and pluripotent self.



Joseph Conte is professor of English at the University at Buffalo. His book *Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction* received the Elizabeth Agee prize in American Literature from the University of Alabama Press in 2002. *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry* was published by Cornell University Press in 1991 and released as an e-book in 2016.

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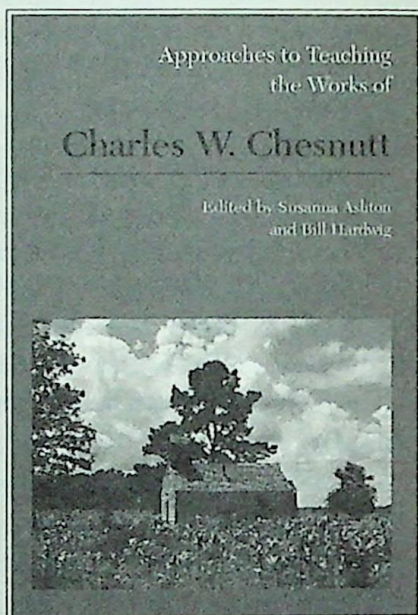
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“A Not-Exactly-Good Man”:

Lionel Trilling on Law and Judgment

Katie Fitzpatrick

The discrepancy between legality and justice could never be bridged because the standards of right and wrong into which positive law translates its authority . . . are necessarily general . . . so that each concrete individual case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

So when we come to look at liberalism in a critical spirit, we have to expect that there will be a discrepancy between what I have called the primal imagination of liberalism and its present manifestations.

—Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*

Probably the most influential literary critic in mid-century America, Lionel Trilling famously argued that literary taste and aesthetic experience were central to the formation of political ideology. That belief is on conspicuous display in his only novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, published in 1947. Although Trilling's characters engage in several pointed political debates, it is an act of literary interpretation that solidifies the terms of their dispute. Maxim, a Marxist revolutionary turned religious conservative, pens an essay on *Billy Budd* for the fictional literary magazine *The New Era*. This prompts an argument among Maxim's friends about whether Captain Vere is justified in his execution of the titular Billy (a saintly sailor who blindly strikes and accidentally kills Claggart, the ship's sinister master-at-arms). Maxim's reactionary interpretation lionizes Vere as the expression of the “world of Necessity” (MJ 182) to which the morally pure Billy must be sacrificed, a view that Nancy Croom—still a committed

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leftist—surprisingly agrees with, evoking the architects of the Moscow trials, who learned to sacrifice subjective innocence to the necessities of history. John Laskell, the novel's sympathetic liberal consciousness, is horrified by their reactions yet finds he is unable to dispute them. "He did not defend his own reading of it" (186), Trilling writes.

While Trilling suggests that their respective interpretations of Melville illuminate his characters' politics, it is curious that we never gain access to Laskell's own interpretation of the novel. Remarking that he did not "defend his own reading of it," the narrator is most directly referring to Laskell's interpretation of Maxim's essay as a reactionary defense of "the rule of force" (183). Yet Laskell also refuses to provide his own reading of *Billy Budd*, either to his friends or to the reader. If both Maxim and Nancy find Billy's execution justified, does Laskell advocate exoneration? We get a possible answer at the close of the novel, when Maxim, Nancy, and Laskell are confronted by a real-life Billy. When Duck Caldwell, a local handyman and notorious drunk, strikes and accidentally kills his daughter Susan, following her botched poetry recital, Maxim finds him fully responsible, while Nancy reads him as a victim of his class position. Laskell, in his final epiphany, declares that Duck is neither guilty nor innocent but, like each of us, both a product of his environment and an autonomous agent responsible for his actions. What, then, of Billy? Is he both guilty and innocent too? And what would that mean for Vere's application of force?

Trilling is best known for his 1950 essay collection *The Liberal Imagination*, which sought to disentangle American liberalism from its interwar association with Marxism. In the wake of both Stalinism and Nazism, he argued, liberalism needed to abandon its utopian aspirations in favor of a more chastened vision of political progress. Trilling viewed literature as central to this project because its expression of "variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty" (2008, xxi) offered a necessary check on ideological rationalizations and utopian impulses. *The Middle of the Journey* shares these political priorities and, accordingly, it has often been viewed as little more than "a cold war curiosity" (Hutchison 2007, 65)—a symptom of liberalism's postwar anticommunist turn. But while it would be impossible to dispute the novel's liberal allegiances, its particular conception of liberalism is profoundly and revealingly fraught. Trilling treats Maxim's conservatism and Nancy's leftism as symmetrical forms of authoritarianism, while Laskell's willingness to dwell in ambivalence makes him a paragon of the liberal imagination as Trilling conceived it; he is committed to "idea[s] in modulation" (*MJ* 352), not to rigid ideologies. But if that contrast between Laskell and his friends might read as didactically

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simple, Laskell's "idea" itself appears as abyssal. What do we do with the conclusion that Duck and Billy are both guilty and innocent? And what version of liberalism does Trilling intend to index with such a claim?

In fact, it should not surprise us that Trilling would tie Laskell's politics to a profound indecision about the relationship between legal and moral judgment—a particularly urgent question when the novel was published in 1947. The effort to reckon with Nazi law, particularly at the Nuremberg trials, produced a profound division among American liberals. While it seemed clear where their moral sympathies should be placed—the Nazis *must* be punished—their traditional commitment to the rule of law made it difficult to justify what were essentially show trials. As Judith Shklar would later observe, the trials represented a "genuine moral crisis" for "persons of liberal convictions and a strong legalistic politics" (1964, 155), for those, that is, wanting to condemn fascism without abandoning the principle of due process. Complicating the matter was the fact that one's view of the trials likely depended on one's perception of Nazi law. For some commentators, it was the *lawlessness* of the Third Reich that facilitated its most extreme violence. It was thus imperative that the architects of the trials perform their own fidelity to the liberal rule of law. For others, meanwhile, it was the *legalism* of the German people that permitted the characteristic Nazi defense: *Befehl ist Befehl*, an order is an order. It would be absurd, on this interpretation, to make one's condemnation of Nazism dependent on the perception of legal objectivity. If genocidal atrocity was a matter of "following orders," then liberal democracy could only be saved by the turn from law to conscience, from legal judgment to a revitalized moral judgment.

This crisis, which occurred at the dawn of the postwar period, would go on to shape philosophical conceptions of law for decades to come. H. L. A. Hart and Lon Fuller (the most influential legal philosophers in the mid-century Anglo-American world) responded to the challenges of Nuremberg by debating the proper relation of law and morals: Fuller insisted on the inherent morality of legal institutions while Hart sought to sever entirely the connection between moral and legal discourse. The questions raised at Nuremberg also posed a challenge for the postwar period's chief interpreter of totalitarianism: Hannah Arendt. In essays like "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship" (1964) and "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" (1965), Arendt argues for individual moral judgment as a response to totalitarian law. She also insists (not least in her own reading of *Billy Budd* in *On Revolution* [1963]) that any effort to situate the individual conscience as the basis of legal authority is *itself* a totalitarian gesture.

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Igniting both popular and scholarly debates, the phenomenon of Nazi law thus raised a profoundly complex set of questions about the proper relation of law and conscience under liberal democracy. In its broadest interpretation, it challenged the very relationship *between* liberalism and democracy. The central question raised by the Nuremberg trials—whether to privilege legal institutions or individual judgment—set a traditional tenet of liberalism (that some fundamental legal rights and protections are *beyond* majoritarian debate) against a more democratic belief in the capacity of individual subjects to question *every* aspect of their own governance.¹ To protect liberal democracy from totalitarianism thus required an understanding of exactly how those hyphenated but distinct political traditions could square their understandings of law, conscience, obedience, resistance, morality, judgment, and human rights.

Set in the 1930s but clearly attuned to the debates of the immediate postwar moment, *The Middle of the Journey* offers an early meditation on these problems. The novel is fundamentally structured by questions about the moral authority of law, not only through *Billy Budd* and Duck Caldwell but also through the Moscow trials and the early rise of fascism. Pondering “the events in Germany” from a prewar vantage, Laskell reflects: “Even among those terrible people there was the preoccupation with guilt and innocence . . . , for those who are punished are guilty and those who punish are innocent” (*MJ* 169–70). Under Nazism, he suggests, those who have the power to inflict legal punishment also have the power to define their victims as morally guilty, thus persuading themselves of their own innocence. Laskell identifies a similar conflation of legal and moral judgment in Maxim and Nancy’s ideological orthodoxies. By contrast, he stands for an internally divided liberal democracy—for a political tradition painfully aware of the divide between individual moral consciousness and the rule of law.

How should this reading of Trilling’s novel affect our assessment of his politics? Trilling has long been critiqued for privileging aesthetic experience over practical, political engagement. In a 1990 manifesto for the New Americanists, Donald Pease offers a by now familiar critique of Trilling as a Cold War consensus liberal who sought to neutralize the critical capacities of literature by effacing its relation to class, to historical-materialism, and to socioeconomic reality more broadly. Trilling’s “field-defining action,” Pease argues, is to “spli[t] the capacious literary consciousness of dialectical processes off from any public world” (1990, 7). Fifteen years later, Sean McCann and Michael Szalay would seek to reorient the assumed political and generational alliances underlying

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Pease's critique, all while retaining the New Americanists's charge against Trilling. In "Do You Believe in Magic?," McCann and Szalay link Trilling's skepticism about social organization and institutional power to the radical cultural politics of the New Left, critiquing *both* for their failure to achieve practical political gains.

My reading of *The Middle of the Journey* will suggest that Trilling was *himself* aware of the limits of the literary imagination, the novel setting the capacious moral consciousness of its liberal protagonist in productive tension with the exigencies of political and legal institutions. Of course, approaching the novel in this way does not require us to overturn our perhaps negative view of Trilling's liberalism. Anyone reading the text from a leftist perspective will still find much to dispute, particularly in his highly negative characterization of Nancy Croom's communist leanings. Nevertheless, I will ultimately argue that the novel's meditation on legality, morality, and politics might help to illuminate our own ambivalent relationship to legal power. If McCann and Szalay accuse much contemporary literary criticism of a "knee-jerk disdain" for the "imperfect justice" (2005, 451) often implicit in institutional politics, then the novel might help us reconceptualize that same "imperfect justice" as a ground for ongoing political contestation.

Reading Trilling in the context of Nuremberg also allows us to trace deep philosophical fissures within the historically specific formation of postwar liberalism, while also exploring a theoretical problem inherent in virtually any form of political organization: how to reconcile the necessarily general scope of legal authority with the particularity of individual ethical experience. Perhaps most surprisingly (given that we are dealing with one of the century's most vocal defenders of literature), it also helps us to understand how the novel form itself might both enable *and* disable that philosophical project. Below, I will begin by outlining the debates arising from the Nuremberg trials, before turning to a reading of the novel and its consequences for contemporary criticism.

"Law itself stood in the dock"

For Judith Shklar, the political trial is defined by its "scorn for the principle of legality": "To some degree most political trials follow Hans Goebbels's famous dictum that trials should begin not with the idea of law, but with the idea that this man must go" (1964, 149). Under this definition the Nuremberg trials must surely be counted as political trials.² Beginning with the premise that "these men must go," they worked backward to identify

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neutral legal precedents that could ground an unprecedented proceeding.³ While the trials sought to condemn the ideology Goebbels represented, they thus also risked charges of retrospective victor's justice or ready comparisons to Stalinist show trials. Although few disputed the moral necessity of punishment for high-ranking Nazis, the effort to ground that condemnation in purportedly "objective" legal precedents seemed more suspect. As Rebecca West notes in her report on the trials, "people all over the world" worried that the defendants were being legally condemned for "carrying out acts as soldiers and sailors must" (1955, 48). The prosecution thus struggled to align its highly sympathetic moral convictions with its outward commitment to the rule of law. The conspicuous misalignment of law and morals that resulted from this effort raised a set of serious questions for postwar liberal democracy: what is the status of immoral but legal acts, and on what authority can we judge them? If we condemn once legal acts on moral grounds, have we abandoned our allegiance to the rule of law? And, finally, if the law had spectacularly lost its authority as an arbiter of moral questions, where should we turn instead?

Over the next decade, those questions would give rise to the monumental Hart-Fuller debate. This debate is probably the most important event in twentieth-century Anglo-American legal philosophy, and it clearly demonstrates the opposing priorities that Trilling would seek to bring into productive tension. In a 1958 issue of the *Harvard Law Review*, Hart and Fuller propose two very different paths for postwar legal philosophy, each intimately connected to the precise problems raised at Nuremberg. While they do not debate the trials themselves, they each invoke the same analogous case: a German woman who had reported her husband's alleged anti-Nazi statements to the authorities (in accordance with Nazi law) is now punished for that same action by a postwar West German court. Hart and Fuller agree that her punishment is morally legitimate, but they dispute whether or not it can be *legally* justified. Fuller believes that there is an inherent correlation between law and morals. Accordingly, any law deserving of the name subscribes to some basic moral and procedural tenets: it should be public, clear, fair, consistent, and nonretroactive, for example.⁴ He argues that Nazi law met none of these criteria and so cannot be regarded as law at all. The woman can therefore be punished since her action never had legal protection in the first place. Fuller's argument offers solace for those liberals looking to align their moral critiques of Nazism with their investment in legal procedure. He redeems law from its association with fascism by making it coincidental with the moral and procedural priorities of liberal democracy.

Hart's response is more complex. For him, there is no necessary (or even aspirational) correlation between law and morals. Law is a simple fact of social

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power; it should be defined by its modes of enactment and enforcement, not by its proximity to any ethical, political, or religious norm. This argument stems from the theory of legal positivism, advanced by Jeremy Bentham, John Austin, and Hans Kelsen, and cemented by Hart's own positivist masterwork *The Concept of Law* (1961). The major philosophical advantage of positivism is its straightforward definitional correctness: legality is legality; morality is morality; it simply is not the case that an immoral law (as in Fuller's account) ceases to be in *actual fact* a law. Yet despite his reliance on these semantic distinctions, Hart also offers what would seem to be a moral and political justification for his school of thought: "Bentham had in mind the anarchist who argues thus: 'This ought not to be the law, therefore it is not and I am free not merely to censure but to disregard it.' On the other hand he thought of the reactionary who argues: 'This is the law, therefore it is what it ought to be,' and thus stifles criticism at its birth" (1958, 598). Here, legal positivism facilitates censure and critique, against both irresponsible disobedience and blind submission. Separating law and morals, Hart argues, makes it possible to meaningfully evaluate the distance between them. Legal positivism offers both definitional and ethical clarity.

Unlike Fuller, Hart insists that Nazi law was law even if it was "too evil to be obeyed" (620). What does this mean, then, for the case of the German woman? Hart argues that the decision to punish represents, at best, "a choice . . . between two evils" (619). While it would be wrong to turn a blind eye to her complicity in her husband's arrest, legally punishing her for an act committed under the banner of law would also violate a "very precious principle of morality endorsed by most legal systems": the ban on retroactive punishment. Although condemning her might be morally just, it also represents a procedural *injustice*; it implies that the law may turn on you today for an act it demanded of you yesterday.

Yet the reader may already notice another problem here. How can Hart characterize retroactive law as an evil when he has been at pains to distinguish law from any moral criteria whatsoever? Fuller elaborates this problem in his own response:

I hope I am not being unjust to Professor Hart when I say that I can find no way of describing the dilemma as he sees it but to use some such words as the following: On the one hand, we have an amoral datum called law, which has the peculiar quality of creating a moral duty to obey it. On the other hand we have a moral duty to do what we think is right and decent. When we are confronted by a statute we believe to be thoroughly evil, we have to choose between those two duties. . . . It is like saying I

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have to choose between giving food to a starving man and being mimsy with the borogoves. (1958, 656)

Legal positivism, Fuller insists, cannot void the moral content of law while also attributing some ill-defined moral suasion to the standards of legality. Hart cannot critique “the anarchist who argues . . . ‘This ought not to be the law, therefore it is not and I am free not merely to censure but to disregard it’” (Hart 1958, 598) unless he is willing to argue that obedience is a moral good. Hart is clear that we should disobey extremely odious laws, but he cannot explain why he would seek to protect less self-evidently evil legal systems from the judgment of the anarchist. He perhaps thinks that, for political or moral reasons, social order is generally preferable to anarchy.⁵ But if so, how are we to balance the value of social order against our own moral principles? Certainly, that is the crucial question; it is one Hart does not answer.

While it takes place several years after the Nuremberg trials, the Hart-Fuller debate demonstrates the ethical and political complexity of what might appear to be merely technical or procedural questions. Fuller’s argument aims to reconcile the “moral crisis” described by Shklar: if law necessarily expresses liberal democratic morality then the trial can satisfy those with “liberal convictions *and* a strong commitment to legalistic politics” (Fuller 1964, 155 emphasis added). Hart’s argument, by contrast, registers the deep challenge that Nazi power poses for liberal legal institutions. If the law is capable of such excesses, then certainly it cannot command any moral authority *as such*. Indeed, this is precisely the charge that more recent and more radical thinkers like Giorgio Agamben (1998) have made against the liberal democratic tradition: that the Nazi camps were merely an extension of a form of violence implicit in *any* appeal to legal authority. Although Hart is clear that law should not “supplant morality” (1958, 618)—that resistance to unjust law is a morally legitimate option—he certainly does not pursue the much more radical line of critique visible in Agamben. Instead, he continues to associate the rule of law with some (weak, ill-defined) moral force. While Hart’s positivism would come to dominate the postwar legal scene, the fundamental question his work raises remains unanswered: if law has no necessary moral authority, why should we feel compelled to follow it at all? Or, more modestly, how can we know when to follow it and when not to? As a legal but not a moral philosopher, Hart leaves those broader questions unanswered. But for other postwar thinkers, moral judgment became a central category for thinking about liberal democratic responses

to totalitarian law. How could subjects learn to reliably determine right from wrong, even under conditions of extreme political, legal, and ideological pressure?

This is the question that Hannah Arendt would take up in “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship” and “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” (both collected in *Responsibility and Judgment*). She describes the moral-philosophical question presented by the legalized criminality of the Nazi regime: how did some citizens retain their moral judgment under conditions where “every moral act was illegal and every legal act was a crime”? (2003a, 41). Arendt argues that what distinguished these citizens was not their erudition or intelligence but their simple capacity “to think.”⁶ For Arendt, the solitary experience of thought allows subjects to engage in ethical dialogue with themselves. This dialogue, in turn, raises the specter of internal disharmony. If someone “is a thinking being, rooted in his thoughts and remembrances, and hence knowing that he has to live with himself,” she explains, “there will be limits to what he can permit himself to do, and these limits will not be imposed on him from the outside, but will be self-set” (2003b, 101). This conclusion is vital for Arendt because it allows her to situate the moral consciousness of liberal democracy outside any set ethical or legal system; indeed, it suggests that deference to external moral authorities will degrade one’s capacity for ethical thinking.

But while the essays collected in *Responsibility and Judgment* treat individual moral judgment as democracy’s vital core, Arendt’s essay on civil disobedience casts such judgment as a distraction from the properly collective work of political contestation. In that essay she argues that “the counsels of conscience are not only unpolitical; they are always expressed in purely subjective statements” (1972, 62). “The political and legal trouble with [appealing to individual conscience] is twofold,” she goes on to explain: “First, it cannot be generalized; in order to keep its validity, it must remain subjective. What I cannot live with may not bother another man’s conscience. . . . The second, and perhaps even more serious, trouble is that conscience, if it is defined in secular terms, presupposes . . . that man possesses the innate faculty of telling right from wrong” (64). Despite appearances, these passages do not directly contradict her other writing on conscience, for throughout her work, Arendt insistently distinguishes among the political, social, and private spheres. Moral judgment may be an adequate measure for the *private* subject looking to avoid complicity in a catastrophic regime, she suggests, but it cannot serve as the basis of a *political* protest movement. Civil disobedience practices, she insists, must

be grounded in the collective action of “organized minorities” (98) not in the vagaries of the individual conscience. For Arendt, individual moral judgment remains an invaluable ethical practice but falls short as a substitute for political and legal justification. For this reason, it is not exactly clear what kinds of actions moral judgment *could* authorize and in what contexts.

At the close of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt takes her critique of conscience one step further, clearly decrying efforts to remake the law in the image of individual morality as *themselves* totalitarian. The central problem with totalitarian law, she argues, is its claim to embody absolute moral truths. It can do away with “petty legality,” with the dull, slow grind of legal institutions, because it purports to immediately express the higher laws of nature and history ([1951] 1979, 462). This can seem like an appealing alternative, she suggests, because liberal democratic law will inevitably fall short of our moral expectations:

Totalitarian lawfulness pretends to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth—something which the legality of positive law admittedly could never attain. The discrepancy between legality and justice could never be bridged because the standards of right and wrong into which positive law translates its own source of authority . . . are necessarily general and must be valid for a countless and unpredictable number of cases, so that each concrete individual case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it.

Here, Arendt echoes the concern raised in her civil disobedience essay: that any attempt to fully embody moral principles within the law, to elevate conscience as an immediate legal justification, will lack the general or collective validity on which democratic law should depend. There will always be a “discrepancy between legality and justice,” she suggests, because no actually existing, democratic legal order could immediately or perfectly express the moral principles of each citizen. While collective political actions (like civil disobedience) can and should push the state toward a more just order, this process will always be limited, gradual, or halting. Crucially, however, it is that very imperfection that will allow for continued efforts at contestation and resistance. Arendt thus transforms what might be a disappointing fact about the legal order—that its proceduralism, bureaucracy, and purported generality make it somewhat alien to our most urgent moral convictions—into the very condition of liberal democratic government.

The effort to legally condemn Nazi law made visible a paradox that American liberals would struggle to reconcile across the early postwar period. Legal principles (from due process to human rights) offered a potential refuge from fascist violence. At the same time, it was disturbingly clear to many that the law bore no necessary relationship to morality, that some laws were “too evil to be obeyed” (Hart 1958, 620). The discrepancy between these two positions is what Arendt works to address; she hopes to revitalize moral judgment while simultaneously defending (and even applauding) the law in the face of its necessary failure to fully encompass the complexity of moral experience. Citizens need to judge for themselves, but they also need to recognize that liberal democracy depends on the “discrepancy between legality and justice” (Arendt [1951] 1979, 462). They need to develop a rigorous, critical relationship to law that also accounts for its inevitable falling short as an expression of justice. Although debates centered around that discrepancy would unfold in the decades following the Second World War, Trilling’s novel offers an early attempt to wrestle the challenges that Nuremberg and Nazi law would pose for postwar conceptions of liberal democracy.

The tragic choice

In his essay “Art and Fortune” (collected in *The Liberal Imagination*), Trilling assesses the fate of the novel in the wake of the Second World War. “The world and the soul have split open of themselves and are all agape for our revolted inspection,” he writes. “Indeed, before what we now know the mind stops. . . . There is no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald. The activity of mind fails before the incommunicability of man’s suffering” (2008, 264–65). At the close of the essay, he concludes that the only way to confront “the terrible circumstances of our time” (279) is to look at them aslant. We must “not succumb to History’s most malign and subtle trick, which is to fix and fascinate the mind of men with the pride of their foreknowledge of doom. There are times when, as the method of Perseus with the Medusa suggests, you do well not to look straight at what you are dealing with but rather to see it in the mirror-shield that the hero carried” (280). Trilling’s 1947 novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, is itself centrally concerned with the “incommunicability” of violence, although it examines Nazi crimes only through the indirection of the “mirror-shield.” Set in the 1930s, the novel considers the nature of authoritarian personality, and in particular its inability to make meaningful judgments about complicity

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and responsibility. Critiquing both his communist and conservative friends, Laskell observes that their legalistic obsession with the “transaction between guilt and innocence” seems to mirror “the events in Germany” (MJ 169) and the rise of the Third Reich. While the novel is most explicitly interested in critiquing Stalinism, that critique is filtered through the postwar reader’s knowledge of the Hitler-Stalin pact and through that reader’s likely perception of a fundamental affinity between fascism and Soviet communism (a connection that Arendt would articulate a few years later with the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*). In setting his postwar critique of totalitarian ideology within an earlier, interwar frame, Trilling is able to think through a moment when things might have gone differently; he is able, as his own essay urges, to resist fascination by the “foreknowledge of doom” (2008, 280).

Although Trilling avoids explicit engagement with the events of the Second World War, an anxiety about the future haunts the novel. It closes with Laskell’s premonition that his political disputes with his friends are part of a broader historical trajectory: “Other people in similar situations must have had their conversations touched with unhappiness, perhaps greater that year, if they were intelligent, than the year before because of the growing knowledge that intelligent people had of the danger in the world” (MJ 359). This kind of premonition also appears early in the novel, when, waiting alone at a train station, Laskell is overcome by an inexplicable existential dread:

He did not know what he was afraid of. He was not terrified by anything, he was just in terror. . . . There was the image of the Mexican politician lying on the ground, unconscious while his enemy administered a hypodermic and cut his tongue out. This was something Laskell had read about in a newspaper in his boyhood in the time of Huerta. There was the image of Chinese torture in which a man was shut in a narrow position in a box and fed at intervals and left to endure like that. This also came from something he had read in his boyhood. And from a newspaper item he had read quite recently there came the image of the man who had spent six days ill in his automobile in a thickly populated street in New Haven, able only now and then to ask children to fetch him water; the children had not spoken of his plight, and he lay there unable to move until on the sixth day a woman noticed him. (10–11)

In “Art and Fortune,” Trilling argues that the postwar world is threatened by “losses worse than that of existence—losses of civilization, personality, humanness” (2008, 266), and Laskell’s sudden terror in this scene is rooted in his fear of these deprivations. The first two visions raise the specter of oppressive state violence while the third speaks to the social atomism that allows people to suffer in one another’s midst. Each image is an assault on the freedoms of the liberal subject: the Mexican politician is rendered speechless, the Chinese prisoner is kept immobile, and the sick man is left without human community. In thus evoking “losses worse than that of existence,” the scene expresses the kind of suffering endured under totalitarianism. With these opening and closing disturbing premonitions, Trilling frames the novel with a vague sense of dread about the political future.

If, as Trilling remarks in “Art and Fortune,” “the activity of mind fails before the incommunicability” (265) of mass violence, then part of the project of *The Middle of the Journey* is to recuperate a form of moral judgment that could respond to atrocity while resisting ideological rationalization. Laskell exemplifies this revitalized liberal consciousness as he learns how to reckon with the seeming incomprehensibility of death and violence over the course of the novel. Questions about political force are focused in the novel through images of individual mortality. At the beginning, Laskell suffers a bout of scarlet fever and finds himself curiously entranced by the specter of death. He also struggles to understand the death of his fiancée, Elizabeth Fuess—an event that precedes the novel’s action. Finally, when Susan Caldwell is struck and killed by her father, Laskell must question both Duck’s moral responsibility and his own complicity in the event (having had an affair with Duck’s wife and coached Susan before her poetry recital, he worries that he fueled Duck’s jealous anger, both as a husband and a father). Although these events appear as singular moral quandaries, they also take on a distinct political-ideological significance. In his 1975 introduction to the novel, Trilling explains that the text began as a novella with a single controlling theme: “What had happened to the way death is conceived by the enlightened consciousness of the modern age” (*MJ* xx). When Laskell hopes to discuss his grief and his own near-fatal illness with his “enlightened” Marxist friends, he finds that they either dismiss the subject or swiftly rationalize it away. Trilling identifies this as symptomatic of a progressive-utopian denial of the centrality of the death drive (and of violence and suffering more broadly) to human civilization. As he explains in his introduction, it is as though death itself were becoming “reactionary” (xxi). With Laskell, then, the

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novel tries to exemplify a relation to death and violence that would neither dismiss, nor rationalize, nor glorify it.⁷

While he struggles to comprehend death throughout the novel, it is only after the loss of Susan Caldwell that Laskell finally arrives at his more nuanced vision and confronts his friends about their failures of judgment. When Susan stumbles over her words during a local poetry recital, Duck Caldwell—drunk, jealous, and ashamed—strikes her twice with his open palm, and she dies immediately, largely due to an underlying heart condition that had been kept secret from her father by Duck's wife, Emily Caldwell. The improbable plot device of Susan's sudden death functions for Trilling as a way of literalizing the political issue over which his characters differ: is it the individual will (Duck's blow) or underlying structures (Susan's heart "condition") that are ultimately responsible for human suffering? Maxim, the novel's apocalyptic, religious conservative places the blame squarely on Duck's own sinful will. Like each of us, Duck is absolutely guilty and in need of God's forgiveness, Maxim reasons. By contrast, Nancy's Marxist progressivism displaces blame onto underlying environmental conditions, both Susan's unknown illness and, by implication, Duck's alienation from the middle-class liberal education that the poetry recital (and Laskell's coaching) represent.

Yet while Maxim and Nancy offer contrary judgments, they arrive at their conclusions through mirrored forms of ideological reasoning. Each conflates a judgment of Duck with a broader conception of human history. Laskell observes that, in condemning Duck, Maxim is seeking "company in his [own] guilt" (313). Speaking of his underground work for the Communist party (prior to his political conversion), Maxim laments, "My hands are bloody because of what I was, because of what I consented to, because of my associations" (315).⁸ Himself guilty by association, Maxim seeks to implicate everyone in his own apparent criminality. His newfound religious conservatism thus serves to absolve him of any specific burden: the doctrine of original sin condemns us all, including Duck.

Nancy, meanwhile, offers the obverse reaction. Convinced that Duck is not responsible for his own actions, she simultaneously exonerates herself. This position is made clear in a later confrontation with Maxim:

"Who *is* to blame, Nancy?" Maxim said.

"I told you—Arthur told you. Society."

"Are you a member of society?" Maxim had the Socratic manner.

"Yes, of course I am," said Nancy . . .

"Are you to blame for what Duck did? I mean are you to blame in part?" . . . "Nancy's not part of society in that sense," Arthur said . . . "Nor are any of us."

"Is that true, Nancy? Do you agree with that? That you are not part of society in every sense?"

"Well, I'm against the bad in society. If you mean, do I have any share in what Duck did—no, I don't." (348)

In this (ungenerous) parody of Marxist thinking, Nancy shifts responsibility to society itself, while also emptying the social of its individual human content. If Maxim finds everyone guilty along with Duck, then she insists on the universal innocence of the working class and, apparently, of the intellectual vanguard. Nancy's and Maxim's seemingly stark verdicts thus serve to eradicate the conditions of meaningful moral judgment. For Trilling, their turn to social causation and guilt by association leads to an elision of responsibility and complicity. Instead of judging Duck's individual crime, they debate the moral standing of humanity itself.

In the hours and days following Susan's death, Laskell also struggles to comprehend the nature of Duck's responsibility—and with it his and his friends' complicity. Attempting to trace the events leading to his own questionable behavior, he is overwhelmed by the sheer scale of causality:

There was no logic in it, or perhaps there was too much logic in it. It went back, for that matter, beyond Duck—there was his illness, and Paine and Miss Debry. It probably went back even farther than that. . . . He gave it up, it was getting too involved. When something involved so many things so tenuously, then it was ridiculous to think about it as responsibility. One could no longer *think* about it at all, one could only feel. (312)

Here, Laskell experiences the vertigo of historical reasoning; in his attempt to retrace every event leading to Duck's blow, he loses his ability to distinguish mere precipitation from genuine moral responsibility, a judgment that would seem to depend on relinquishing the logic of causation in favor of a more intuitive conception of guilt ("one could only feel"). Yet the failure of judgment he experiences here also seems vital to his later understanding of guilt and responsibility; while Nancy and Maxim quickly incorporate the event into their existing ideological frames, Laskell's initial state of confusion allows him to appreciate the profundity and complexity of the question at hand.

In a climactic ideological confrontation with Maxim and Nancy, Laskell ultimately recovers his capacity for moral judgment, rejecting both their verdicts on Duck's crime: "An absolute freedom from responsibility—that much of a child none of us can be. An absolute responsibility—that much of a divine or metaphysical essence none of us is. . . . I cannot absolve the world or society or God or my parents or nature from all blame from what I am or do. . . . And for that matter, I cannot avoid my gratitude to them" (351). For Laskell, Duck's violence is both within and beyond his control, both a product of circumstance and an expression of will. With this more nuanced conception, he evades Nancy's and Maxim's symmetrically legalistic conceptions of guilt and innocence. Indeed, the two ideologues find themselves united against what they perceive as Laskell's "bourgeois intellectual . . . shilly-shally." "You will preach the law for the masses," Maxim tells Nancy in his ensuing tirade, "I will preach the law for the leaders. . . . We will hate each other and we will make the new world" (355). Foreshadowing the rise of Stalinism and Nazism, Maxim here echoes the language that Laskell had earlier associated with "the events in Germany." The "preoccupation with guilt and innocence" "among those terrible people" precludes any meaningful engagement with individual ethical responsibility, and instead casts individual subjects into morally stark allegories of punishment and redemption. In this light, Laskell's final epiphany presents an important conclusion for the novel's postwar liberal readers: to evade the dangers of totalitarianism and to recover from its atrocities, liberalism must revitalize its capacity to engage in subtle moral judgment, resisting the strictures of legalistic condemnation and ideological rationalization.

For Trilling, as one might anticipate, this liberal form of judgment is intimately connected to literary experience as he defines it in *The Liberal Imagination*: a literary idea as "two emotions [in] juxtaposition" (2008, 283). This approach is exemplified in Laskell's more nuanced conception of responsibility—described as an "idea in modulation" (*MJ* 352). Maxim and Nancy offer legalistic verdicts of guilt and innocence, but Nancy's confident exoneration of Duck is belied by her shock when she hears that he has indeed been found innocent by the police and will be returning to the area to live as before. Laskell, by contrast, seeks to preserve the moral ambiguity that Nancy feels compelled to repress. He offers a properly *literary* judgment, one rooted in the reader's intimate experience of Laskell's consciousness and in their own vague intuitions about Duck's character. Although Laskell might allow his observations about responsibility to cohere into some mitigated verdict—manslaughter,

negligence, abuse—he instead insists on retaining the dialectical complexity of his response.⁹ In stopping short of offering a final verdict, he also frees readers from the expectation that they reconcile their own conflicting attitudes toward Duck, that they choose between their anger and their pity. Any effort to resolve the contradictions of Duck's circumstance would betray Trilling's political and aesthetic investment in the nuance of the literary idea. With the climactic debate over Duck Caldwell's guilt, Trilling thus establishes a particularly literary form of moral judgment over and against the legalistic dogmatism he associates with the totalitarian personality. If Maxim and Nancy "preach the law" (355), Laskell represents a liberal consciousness freed from the binary opposition between guilt and innocence; he will reckon with moral responsibility by refusing to deny its necessary complexity.

If postwar American liberals were uncertain about the relationship between law and morality, then Trilling's novel would seem to fall decisively on the side of moral judgment. Indeed, that conclusion may not seem surprising, given Trilling's well-known critique of institutional politics in the preface to *The Liberal Imagination*. It is there that he famously argues:

When we approach liberalism in a critical spirit, we shall fail in critical completeness if we do not take into account the value and necessity of its organizational impulse. But at the same time we must understand that organization means delegation, and agencies, and bureaus, and technicians and that ideas that can survive delegation, that can be passed on to agencies and bureaus and technicians, incline to be ideas of a certain kind and of a certain simplicity: they give up something of their largeness and modulation and complexity in order to survive. (2008, xx–xxi)

Trilling here seeks to elevate the dialectical, literary imagination above the exigencies of institutional politics, but critics often miss the dialectical tension at work in this passage; despite his skepticism, Trilling still insists on the "value and necessity" of the organizational impulse. *The Middle of the Journey* offers a similar turn: while the conclusion emphasizes Laskell's capacity for judgment, the novel as a whole refuses to endorse individual conscience at the expense of legal institutionality. Through debates about *Billy Budd* and about the sonnet form, Trilling exposes Maxim's and Nancy's legalistic commitments as *moralistic* perversions of the rule of law. This critique puts Laskell in the position of defending legal process and constraint, forces that would seem to limit the "largeness and modulation and complexity" of his own moral perception. Rather than elevating

literary *over* legal judgment, then, the novel ultimately seeks to stage an irreconcilable tension between them.

Maxim's essay on *Billy Budd* is a vociferous defense of Captain Vere, the embodiment of "Law in the world of Necessity" (MJ 185). To exonerate Billy, Maxim argues, would be to abandon the reality of institutional political power in favor of a utopian belief in the fulfillment of "Spirit": "The belief of the modern progressive is that Spirit should find its complete expression at once. . . . To such minds, Captain Vere is culpable because he does not acquit Billy in defiance of all Law" (182). Given her later judgment of Duck Caldwell, we might expect Nancy to take up the role of Billy's progressive advocate. Yet she also defends the execution:

If you think about it . . . you see that it is really quite applicable to the Moscow trials. Even if those men were subjectively innocent—I mean even if they had good motives for what they did, like Budd—I don't believe that's so, but even if it were so—they may have had to be executed for the sake of what [Maxim] calls Law in the world of Necessity. And you remember how they all concurred in their punishment and seemed almost to *want* it. Certainly, before they died they had a proper appreciation of Law. They realized that the dictatorship of the proletariat represented Law. (184–85)

Nancy's response reveals what Trilling sees as a fundamental affinity between Maxim's authoritarianism and Nancy's ostensible progressivism. Where Maxim treats Vere as an expression of "Law" *against* "Spirit," Nancy seems to have collapsed the two principles into one another: Law has come to represent the fulfillment of the spirit of history in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Both their ideologies require a submission to law, but in Nancy's case institutional legal power has been reconciled with the political and moral will of those subjected to it: "They . . . seemed almost to *want* it" (185), she observes. Faced with these two options, Laskell is overcome by a vague "intellectual nausea" (183), yet finds himself unable to dispute their interpretations. Why not marshal his more sophisticated moral judgment either to mitigate Billy's guilt or to complicate Vere's status as an embodiment of necessity?

A later confrontation with Nancy illuminates the nature of their disagreement—both for Laskell and for the reader. When the two embark on an afternoon fishing trip with Duck, Laskell is mocked for his elaborate fly-fishing equipment. Compared to Duck's more rustic, masculine approach, his appears needlessly contrived. Laskell bristles

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at this mockery and responds with a self-consciously pedantic speech on self-imposed limitation. "It's a tendency that human life has. . . . It makes requirements and sets limits to itself," he explains, "It's like making sonnets. . . . You set the pattern, a difficult pattern, and the effect comes from conforming to it successfully, you overcome it, and it serves your purpose" (203). Laskell's ostensible subjects are fishing and poetry, but the debate is quickly incorporated into the novel's overarching ideological conflict. Nancy is disgusted by his professorial approach, and even Laskell acknowledges that this is an "old, worn paradox." But the exchange also illuminates their earlier discussion of Melville. Laskell thinks:

It was not sonnets she was holding in such contempt, but the very idea of conforming. It was a little confusing, for he remembered at that moment her interpretation of Gifford Maxim's article and the relative leniency with which she had spoken about the Commissars who had confessed and, at the end, had cried "God bless Captain Vere!" And yet that confusion strangely enlightened him—that confusion in which Nancy both admired conformity and despised it. For he saw that Nancy's feeling was not about conforming or not conforming, not about freedom or submission. It was a feeling about human nature, a profound dissatisfaction with the way human beings had ever been, some leap of her imagination toward some way she hoped they would be. (204)

The question at the heart of *Billy Budd* is no longer freedom or submission, exoneration or punishment, but the potential perfectibility of social institutions and of human life. Nancy punishes Billy not to reconcile herself to constraint but to eradicate the distance between law and spirit. The Commissars are free because the law to which they submit is reimagined as an expression of their own will—in other words, it is not a constraint at all. It is on this basis that Laskell concludes that Nancy both "admired conformity and despised it." Her political philosophy would seem to require the use of law to bring about the fulfillment of spirit, yet it also seeks to efface its own reliance on constraint. Like the totalitarian law Arendt would describe a few years later, Nancy's Vere represents a supreme moral law, elevated above the actual, quotidian operations of legal institutionality.

Laskell's situation is the precise inverse. He *also* admires and despises conformity, but for different reasons. Disgusted by the glee that Maxim and Nancy seem to take in executing Billy, he is yet unwilling to disavow

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constraint *as such*. Indeed, he insists that some recognition of constraint is central to political and aesthetic experience. It is this tension that keeps Laskell from disputing their interpretations of Melville. He cannot approve of their violence but is also unwilling to argue against the legal institutionality Vere represents.

Such a conclusion is supported by an intriguing entry in Trilling's journal, written around the time of the novel's composition (the journal is dated 1946–48; the novel is published in 1947). Here, Trilling offers an interpretation of *Billy Budd* that is strikingly similar to Maxim's reactionary version (indeed, in places, it is almost verbatim):

Spirit. The modern feeling that spirit should find its complete expression *immediately* in the world of necessity and that all that falls short of the full expression of spirit is repulsive. . . . My student [sic] discussing Billy Budd, feel that there is really nothing to be said about the story. Vere is, to them, wholly culpable, Budd being good. Law does not express spirit—even kills it! They insist that this is the whole and final truth in the matter. They think that Vere is a not-exactly-bad man, but a stuffy one, and in objective result bad. They do not understand the *tragic* choice. They want the reign of spirit immediately. What they do not understand is that if spirit exists in its purity, so does evil in the form of Claggett [sic] and that Claggett makes Vere necessary as an intermediate force between him and Budd. Something extensive could be written about this.¹⁰ (Trilling 1946–48)

The context I elaborated at the beginning of this essay makes clear why Trilling's students—reading Melville's novel in the immediate postwar period—might be reluctant to endorse Vere's action.¹¹ Though his "stuffy," unrelenting commitment to the rule of law might make him an icon of what Arendt would later call the "banality of evil" (2006, 252), Trilling resists what he sees as the moral simplicity of this response. If his students see Vere as a not-exactly-bad man, Trilling describes him as a not-exactly-good one: if Budd is good, Vere is only necessary, and Melville's bourgeois captain represents an institutional form that will never be fully morally righteous but is vital nevertheless.¹² How then should we read the relation between this interpretation and the very similar one Maxim offers in the novel? Does the journal entry suggest that Trilling might be sympathetic to the interpretation offered by the decidedly unsympathetic Maxim?

What kind of political philosophy is implied by this view of the novel?

Those familiar with Arendt's work may recognize the way Trilling's journal entry forecasts her own reading of Melville in her 1963 book *On Revolution*. *Billy Budd*, she argues there, demonstrates the dangers of basing politics in morality—an error she associates in this text with the French Revolution but that also grounds her critique of totalitarian lawlessness at the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Any recourse to moral absolutes, she argues, dooms the political project of democracy, just as Billy's absolute goodness threatens the operation of law. Melville's "topic," she argues, "is goodness beyond virtue and evil beyond vice, and the plot of the story consists in confronting these two. . . . Both are outside society, and the two men [Billy and Claggart] who embody them come, socially speaking, from nowhere" (1963, 78). By contrast, Captain Vere speaks for the potential virtue of socially embedded political institutions:

Virtue—which perhaps is less than goodness but still alone is capable "of embodiment in lasting institutions"—must prevail at the expense of the good man as well; absolute, natural innocence, because it can only act violently, is "at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind," so that virtue finally interferes not to prevent the crime of evil but to punish the violence of absolute innocence. . . . The tragedy is that the law is made for men, and neither for angels nor for devils. Laws and all "lasting institutions" break down not only under the onslaught of elemental evil but under the impact of absolute innocence as well. (79)

Arendt distinguishes between idealism and "virtue," insisting that the latter is the only moral quality appropriate to the sphere of law. If we are accustomed to critiquing legal institutions for their distance from the urgency and nuance of conscience, then Arendt reimagines that distance as proper to it. The passage thus expresses—in radically condensed form—the tension I identified in her broader approach to law, conscience, and civil disobedience. Valuing moral judgment, Arendt insists that morality cannot be straightforwardly assimilated into political and institutional forms. Instead, politics must be the domain of "virtue"—which, despite its association with Vere, does not indicate mere obedience ("A society that blindly subjects itself to the necessity of the laws it has made for itself must necessarily perish" [2007, 101], she writes elsewhere). Indeed, as she makes clear throughout her work, the political sphere is necessarily

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a space of contestation, resistance, and renewal. But these are processes that, if they hope to endure, must be allowed their provisional, imperfect, and gradual nature—must acknowledge, that is, their necessary distance from absolute goodness.

The interpretation offered in Trilling's journal admittedly places less emphasis on the political sphere than does Arendt's (a problem I will take up further in the final pages of this essay). Yet the two accounts share a conviction about the story that neither Nancy's nor Maxim's versions would concede. Both characters read Billy's death as a kind of affirmative martyrdom. In Nancy's account, his death allows for the expression of history, and in Maxim's Billy's death makes God's grace possible and necessary.¹³ Refusing such a reconciliation, Trilling and Arendt emphasize the tragic dimension of the story (Trilling describes "the tragic choice," while Arendt explains "the tragedy is that the law is made for men").¹⁴ They both identify an intractable problem with politics (and with liberal democracy) as they understand it: that morality cannot be sacrificed for law and that law cannot be sacrificed for morality. Although Maxim's fictional essay echoes the entry in Trilling's journal in several places, the two accounts ultimately imply a different view of the law's moral quality: in Maxim's essay, legal force represents the fulfillment of moral and theological principles (it punishes man for original sin and so enables redemptive grace); in Trilling's journal (as in Arendt's interpretation) the best we can hope for is something "less than goodness" but "not-exactly-bad"—the necessary, quotidian imperfection of legal institutional forms.

Rather than reading the journal entry as the key to Maxim's essay, then, I would suggest we read it alongside the novel as a whole. Just as the entry itself argues that Melville's novel is fundamentally concerned with staging an irreconcilable tension between law and morals, Trilling seems to model his own novel on that same tension, which he stages in two distinct ways. First, he presents Duck Caldwell's crime—echoing Billy's own—as fundamentally undecidable: he is both guilty and innocent. The conclusion thus positions Laskell's highly literary mode of perception as a potential antidote to the fetishization of law and state power in totalitarian ideologies. From this perspective, the novel's pedagogical function is to model a renewed form of individual, moral judgment—one best exemplified by the nuances of the literary idea. But the debates over *Billy Budd* and the sonnet form—a second staging of the tension between law and morality—treat that tension in rather different terms. In these, Laskell emphasizes the potentially productive dimensions of even

morally imperfect legal forms: he cannot choose between Vere and Billy because he believes in the social institution Vere represents, yet insists on preserving his critique of its moral failings. Here, then, we perceive the limitations of even Laskell's own nuanced judgment. While it is a powerful form of individual perception, it must always remain somewhat estranged from the realities of institutional constraint. In this way, Trilling places Laskell's own dialectical imagination under dialectical pressure. He ties the renewal of postwar liberalism to an infinitely nuanced moral consciousness, while also recognizing that liberal politics rely on much more mundane and imperfect institutional forms.

The Middle of the Journey thus takes up both poles of the controversy arising from the Nuremberg trials, both warning against and defending legal authority. This nuance is difficult to perceive when the novel's interwar setting is emphasized in place of its own postwar moment. In *Writing the Republic* (2007), for example, Anthony Hutchison also compares Trilling's and Arendt's interpretations of *Billy Budd*, and while his discussion is generally compelling, because he reads Trilling's analysis only in the context of the earlier Moscow trials, he concludes that Vere is an essentially totalitarian figure for Trilling (2007, 9). Nancy's and Maxim's sympathies with Vere demonstrate the dangerous perversion of legal necessity under Nazism and Stalinism—a connection Hutchison believes Arendt misses (91). But if the law seems straight-forwardly oppressive in the context of the Moscow trials, it occupies a much more ambiguous place in the Nuremberg trials, which sought to legally condemn the abuse of legal authority. The same ambiguity is legible in Trilling's approach to the topic, not only in his journal entry but also in Laskell's argument with Nancy, when he defends the idea of conforming and resists the subsumption of legal process by utopic ambition.

Reading *The Middle of the Journey* in the context of postwar debates about conscience, judgment, and responsibility thus illuminates complex and previously unexplored aspects of Trilling's thought. But what should all this mean for our evaluation of his politics? Although he has never been without his defenders, Trilling remains an unpopular figure in the world of leftist literary criticism.¹⁵ Certainly, my interpretation does not reveal any particularly progressive vein in the novel; *The Middle of the Journey* remains a decidedly liberal, anticommunist text. Nevertheless, I would suggest that Trilling's attention to the fraught position that the law occupies in postwar liberal democracy might help us to productively examine our own ambivalent relationship to legal and institutional forms.

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The limits of the literary imagination

If we can read Trilling's novel as self-consciously staging the limitations of the moral imagination in the face of institutional political forms, then this would suggest that Trilling was himself capable of articulating a charge that has often been laid against him. As noted early in this essay, Donald Pease, Sean McCann, and Michael Szalay each critique Trilling for elevating a depoliticized mode of aesthetic experience over forms of engaged political practice. For Pease, this makes him exemplary of a Cold War liberal model of literary criticism that the New Americanists aimed to expose and displace. Meanwhile, for McCann and Szalay, Trilling is the chief antecedent of a New Left-inspired literary criticism, which they read as compatible with libertarian antistatism. Certainly, it would be foolish to deny the charge that Trilling situated aesthetics at the heart of a renewed postwar liberalism, and often at the expense of institutional and organizational forms. His oft-quoted preface to *The Liberal Imagination* (cited above) describes his intellectual project in precisely those terms. Nevertheless, his conception of the literary imagination is hardly inattentive to the exigencies of political practice. As Mary Esteve (2005) and Amanda Anderson (2014) have argued, the encounter between moral ideals and limiting "real-world" conditions is central to his conception of literary experience.¹⁶ In "The Function of the Little Magazine," for example, Trilling argues that all literature depends on "the interplay between free will and circumstance" (2008, 96–97). This, of course, is the opposition that Laskell seeks to suspend when he concludes that Duck is both guilty and innocent. But I think we can also read it as inherent to Laskell's own character—it describes his preference for the ineffable complexity of moral judgment along with his recognition of the exigencies of political power.

In this respect, *The Middle of the Journey* actually dovetails with the questions raised by McCann and Szalay. In "Do You Believe in Magic?," they critique the New Left for its "deep suspicion of the powers of the state" (2005, 439). They argue that, while the state might serve as a useful weapon against right-wing libertarianism and neoliberal privatization, the postwar counterculture tended to privilege obscurantist forms of cultural experience over organizational and formal politics. This tendency has also fundamentally shaped American literature and literary criticism in the decades since the apex of the New Left. They argue that, in today's humanities departments, the somewhat mysterious symbolic interventions of the literary novel are often treated as more powerful and more radical

than the practical work of political organization. For McCann and Szalay, this conception of the aesthetic—which obviously helps to bolster the perceived importance of literature and literary criticism—has become “built into the literary academic’s *deformation professionel*” (451).

“Do You Believe in Magic?” casts Trilling as an early exemplar of this tendency; his “dissatisfaction with institutional politics,” they argue, “anticipated” the antistatism evident in Norman Mailer’s writing and in the New Left more broadly (439).¹⁷ There are, of course, some grounds for this charge: *The Liberal Imagination* makes a forceful (not to mention immensely influential) case for the political power of the literary work, particularly in contrast to organizational and bureaucratic forms. But *The Middle of the Journey* reads those poles in a dialectical rather than oppositional relation. McCann and Szalay argue that a “deep investment in the therapeutic value of ineffable mystery” often accompanies “a knee-jerk disdain for mundane political efforts to work toward imperfect justice” (451). Laskell’s infinitely nuanced yet basically inexpressible judgment of Duck seems to model the “therapeutic value of ineffable mystery.” Nevertheless, Trilling also condemns Nancy for her “knee-jerk disdain for mundane political efforts,” all while insisting on the necessarily “imperfect justice” of liberal democratic institutions. In this way, he asks us to think through the limits of legal institutionality *and* of the literary imagination.

Indeed, the “discrepancy between legality and justice” (Arendt [1951] 1979, 462) that Trilling and Arendt identify may actually help us to better conceptualize the kind of committed politics McCann and Szalay hope to advance. As a case in point, we might consider the resonances among Arendt, Trilling, and the contemporary political theorist, Chantal Mouffe. In her 2005 book *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe critiques deliberative-democratic philosophers (John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas) for what she sees as an overly optimistic belief in the rationality of political debate, while also critiquing ethical philosophers (Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida) for their focus on radical alterity and the impossibility of political resolution. Both camps, she argues, refuse to see the role of the “decision” (2005, 130) in political life. While the one side sees a possible reconciliation of pluralistic difference, the other refuses to put any limits on infinite pluralistic differentiation. By contrast, Mouffe envisions politics as a space for ongoing contestation and debate—debate that must, at various points of decision, resolve into definite (though not eternally fixed) laws, institutions, governments, political bodies. Her point is that while we will never achieve inherently just institutions (as the deliberative-democrats posit), we cannot, for this

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reason, perpetually defer our engagement with institutional and legal forms (as the ethical philosophers—and the literary critics McCann and Szalay critique!—might argue). Instead, we have to both make decisions, and keep those decisions open to ongoing contestation.¹⁸ The kind of political commitment Mouffe advocates thus requires us to reckon with the inherently disappointing or imperfect nature of political authority. In fact, it makes that disappointment the precondition of any ongoing democratic politics. This is why, as Mouffe writes, we cannot close “the gap between justice and law that is a constitutive space of modern democracy” (32).

The limitation of Trilling’s approach is that he does not foreground these political consequences in the same way that Arendt and Mouffe do; he seems more interested in observing the paradoxical or tragic nature of the problem than in pursuing its consequences for democratic contestation. And, of course, we have plenty of reason to believe that he would not want to pursue the progressive, social-democratic politics that McCann, Szalay, Mouffe (and I) broadly share. Nevertheless, I think his novel can help us to think through our relation to law. The mundanities of legal process seem (despite McCann and Szalay’s protestations) like an ethically and aesthetically uninspiring avenue for literature and literary criticism, but the law also seems like a vital resource for bringing about the large-scale socioeconomic and political transformations we might desire.

Novels like Trilling’s work through that tension by foregrounding the conflict between more literary forms of experience and critique, and the disappointing, or partial, or instrumental dimensions of practical politics and legal process. *The Middle of the Journey* sets Laskell’s infinitely nuanced yet ultimately inexpressible moral judgment in tension with a force—the law—that could never be entirely faithful to it. Trilling advocates a form of ethical perception attuned to the particularities of circumstance and the idiosyncrasies of character, but also condemns Nancy for failing to recognize that the law could never simply mirror the subtlety and urgency of the individual conscience. In doing so, he also challenges the particular literariness of Laskell’s judgment. Laskell’s conclusion—that Duck is both guilty and innocent—expresses the dialectical tensions Trilling believes are vital to the literary idea, but it is a conclusion that could never hold up in the face of the legal imperative to choose *either* guilt or innocence.

Trilling’s fiction, like his criticism, questions how literally we should understand the relationship between art and politics. Yet where his criticism clearly argues for the powerful ambivalence of literature, his fiction embodies that principle by demonstrating ambivalence about

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the literary imagination itself. Trilling believed that the renewal of postwar liberalism depended on its engagement with the “largeness and modulation and complexity” of literature, but his novel insists that that engagement be imagined in a relation to liberalism’s institutional and “organizational impulse” (2008, xx). *The Middle of the Journey* helps us to understand why, for postwar liberals, conscience could not stand as a straightforward antidote to the abuses of totalitarian law. Ultimately, it suggests that we might do well to recognize that the conflict between law and conscience—what Arendt calls “the discrepancy between legality and justice” ([1951] 1979, 462)—is both a troubling fact of democratic politics and the very space of democracy’s unfolding.

§

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Notes

1. Jürgen Habermas describes this tension between the liberal rule of law and democratic politics in his essay “Constitutional Democracy—A Paradoxical Union of Contradictory Principles?”: “The idea of a ‘rule of law,’ which in the past was expressed in the idea of human rights, comes on the scene alongside—and together with—that of popular sovereignty as a second source of legitimation. This duality raises the question of how the democratic principle and constitutionalism are related” (2006, 113).

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2. In *The Memory of Judgment*, Lawrence Douglas writes: "In the case of spectacular and anomalous trials like Nuremberg and Eichmann, the problem of legitimation looms even larger. In both cases, it can be said that law itself stood in the dock" (2001, 114).
3. For history and interpretation of the Nuremberg trials, see Smith 1977, Luban 1994, and Douglas 2001.
4. Fuller describes these criteria at length in the second chapter of his book *The Morality of Law* (1964), "The Morality that Makes Law Possible" (33–94).
5. Hart hints at such an argument in *The Concept of Law*: "Older writers who, like [Jeremy] Bentham and [John] Austin, insisted on the distinction between what law is and what it ought to be, did so partly because they thought that unless men kept these separate they might, *without counting the cost to society*, make hasty judgments that laws were invalid and ought not to be obeyed" (2012, 211, emphasis added). This clarification is not particularly helpful, however, since, in the next sentence, he counters that "This danger of anarchy . . . may well have [been] overrated."
6. For her famous charge against Eichmann, that he was incapable of thinking, see Arendt 2006, 49.
7. For more on the role of death in Trilling's novel, see Chace 1977 and Szalay 2010.
8. As he describes in his 1975 introduction, Trilling based Maxim's political conversion on Whittaker Chambers's turn from communism to anticommunism (see *MJ* xvi). For an extensive exploration of this connection, see Kimmage 2009.
9. The "dialectical" imagination I am attributing to Laskell should of course be distinguished from the Marxist or historical-materialist dialectic, which the novel associates with Nancy Croom.
10. The journal is stored with the Lionel Trilling papers, at the Columbia University Library. The entry is handwritten, so some interpretation was required in order to transcribe it. Trilling leaves "student" in the singular despite using the plural verb form "feel," and appears to write the name Claggart as Claggett.
11. Trilling's comments on *Billy Budd* come after E. L. Watson's influential 1933 essay "Melville's Testament of Acceptance" and before Phil Withim's 1959 rebuttal, "*Billy Budd*: Testament of Resistance." While Watson elevates Vere as "the man who obeys the law, and yet understands the truth of the spirit" (1933, 321), Withim insists that Melville's novel is a scathing critique of Vere's oppressive legalism. Writing after World War II, Withim treats *Billy Budd*

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as a prophetic warning against the dangers of immoral law: "In local context it suggests that it is wrong to submit to unjust law. Those in power, such as Vere, should do all they can to resist the evil inherent in any institution of government" (1959, 121). Trilling obviously does not share Withim's critical reading, but he also moves beyond Watson's "acceptance" frame. In place of either acceptance or resistance, he emphasizes tragedy and irony. The choice between Vere and Billy, between law and conscience, is a "tragic" one; there is no reconciliation of law and spirit, only the difficult decision to sacrifice one or the other.

12. Trilling echoes this sentiment at the close of his essay on Kipling: "The reluctance to give loyalty to any social organization which falls short of some ideal organization of the future may imply a disgust not so much with the merely national life as with civic life itself" (2008, 128). This kind of idealism, he suggests, stems from a feeling "that politics is not really a proper human activity at all." By inference, then, both "civil life" and "politics" would seem to require, for Trilling, some reconciliation to the limitations of social organization.

13. Maxim's reading is of course rooted in Melville's own (quite explicit) Christian imagery. See Melville 1998.

14. In "Postwar Aesthetics: The Case of Trilling and Adorno," Amanda Anderson argues that, for Trilling, tragedy is associated with "forms of suspension or equivocation . . . a caution or vigilance in the face of moral dangers associated with instrumental action, even and especially instrumental action based on moral passion" (2014, 435). Just as Laskell seems to equivocate on the subject of Billy's guilt, Trilling here suspends the "tragic choice," leaving it unresolved or undecided. As Anderson suggests, his commitment to the "tragedy" of Melville's novel seems to urge a caution in the face of both kinds of moral passion: that which would gleefully execute Billy in the name of state power, and that which would seek to elevate his moral purity as a political principle.

15. Russell Reising, for example, accuses Trilling of having "provid[ed] intellectual respectability for a wide range of opinions and beliefs rampant in mass culture, ideas which, when pushed to their McCarthyite limits, generated investigations and harassments, and shattered many careers, marriages, and lives" (1993, 121). In a 1990 article in *boundary 2*, also cited in the body of this essay, Donald Pease argues that Trilling's critiques of politically tendentious literature produced an "imaginary separation between the cultural and the public sphere" that obscured "the otherwise threatening cultural contradictions released by the cold war consensus" (1990, 8). For Reising and Pease, Trilling's work is at best representative of anti-Stalinist anxieties and, at worst, a Trojan horse for McCarthyist oppression. This starkly critical account is challenged

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in more recent scholarship. Adam Kirsch's 2011 book, *Why Trilling Matters*, makes the case for his status "as one of liberalism's most profound expositors" (70). Mary Esteve (2005) and Amanda Anderson (2014), cited below, also offer sympathetic accounts. For a somewhat earlier defense, see Teres 1996.

16. Mary Esteve emphasizes this dimension of Trilling's thought in her essay "Shipwreck and Autonomy" (which appears alongside "Do You Believe in Magic?" in the Fall 2005 issue of the *Yale Journal of Criticism*). Esteve argues that Trilling is centrally concerned with the encounter between individual will and ineradicable material circumstances:

This is why, as spelled out in his collection of 1940s essays, *The Liberal Imagination*, fictional figures such as Huck Finn and Hyacinth Robinson are important to Trilling: their exemplary autonomy is located in their personally and socially virtuous ways of facing head-on the challenges and sacrifices demanded by their circumstances. Autonomous will for Trilling is thus essentially materialist: it is bound up with psychic force and fortitude, enabling the life-affirming, self-sacrificing individual to wrestle with ineradicable internal and social conflicts. (2005, 329)

In "Postwar Aesthetics," Amanda Anderson emphasizes a similar conflict between political belief and "real-world" social or material conditions: "For Trilling the most relevant literary art shows individuals actively living their moral and political lives, within conditions that always exceed the realm of ideology" (2014, 426).

17. Szalay offers a longer and more nuanced reading of Trilling in his 2010 essay, "Lionel Trilling's Existential State." There, he acknowledges that Trilling's antistatism was accompanied by an investment in the welfare state—or, more particularly, by an "accommodating relation to [state] power" (2010, 1). Yet Szalay maintains the same over-arching critique presented in "Do You Believe in Magic?" He suggests that Trilling privileges "existence and moral being" (15)—especially as they are presented in literature—over more urgent forms of political commitment. Szalay's pointed references to Laskell's desire "just-to-BE" (*MJ* 52) drives home the link to McCann and Szalay's earlier essay. That essay critiqued the New Left (supposedly Trilling's intellectual descendants) for protests like the "Human Be-In" (McCann and Szalay 2005, 437), which shifted focus from politics to "existence itself" (446). I have argued that while Trilling was no doubt interested in representing "existence and moral being" (Szalay 2010, 15), *The Middle of the Journey* is also self-conscious about the limitations of such an approach.

18. See, in particular, the final chapter: "Conclusion: The Ethics of Democracy," 129–40. There Mouffe writes:

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The vocabulary of those who defend the “ethical” perspective comes from a diversity of philosophical sources. . . . But what is missing in all of them—as in the deliberative approach—is a proper reflection on the moment of ‘decision’ which characterizes the field of politics. This has serious consequences, since it is precisely those decisions—which are always taken in an undecidable terrain—which structure hegemonic relations. They entail an element of force and violence that can never be eliminated and cannot be adequately apprehended through the sole language of ethics or morality. (2005, 130)

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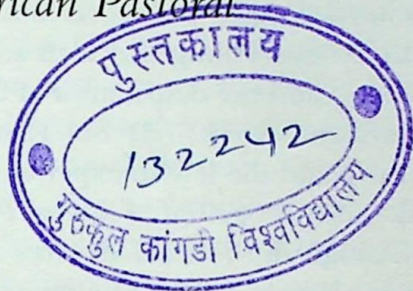
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“Newark’s Just a Black Colony”:

Race in Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*

Jung-Suk Hwang



In an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, responding to the commonly repeated notion that America “lost her innocence” after 9/11, Philip Roth replied: “What innocence? From 1668 to 1865 this country had slavery; and from 1865 to 1955 was a society existing under a brutal segregation. I don’t really know what these people are talking about” (Leith 2002). By invoking the nation’s troubled racial history, Roth rejects American innocence, which is claimed to exist until 9/11, criticizing Americans for their *innocence*—their ignorance and lack of historical awareness—and their perpetuation of an idealized vision of the nation. This interview directly echoes material Roth read for *American Pastoral* (1997),¹ especially “Black America 1970,” published in *Time* on April 6, 1970, which stresses that African Americans are “faithful dreamers of the American dream—but scandalously hampered in turning that dream into reality for themselves” due to omnipresent racism. The article continues: “How America deals with blacks and their aspirations will define for decades and perhaps centuries what kind of country America really is. How America deals with them, and therefore with itself, will show it to be either the country seen by its bitter critics—selfish and oppressive. Or else the country seen by its defenders—greatly troubled but still in the grip of its original moral purpose and promise” (13). For Roth, African Americans are thus crucial for defining America, and *American Pastoral* addresses them in relation to the myth of the American Dream and “what kind of country America really is.” African Americans, however, remain largely neglected in current scholarship of Roth’s novel.

Roth’s protagonist is Seymour Irving Levov (“the Swede”), the grandson of Jewish immigrants. A faithful believer in the American Dream and national ideals of equality and inclusivity, the Swede lives in an ideal home located in a wealthy, idyllic Newark suburb, Old

Rimrock. Yet in 1968 his sixteen-year-old daughter Meredith ("Merry") detonates a bomb at a local post office to protest the Vietnam War, and this immediately "transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk" (AP 86). Roth's works have engaged issues of Jewish identity and the Jewish experience in America, but due to the "historical and social scope" of *American Pastoral*, as Laura Tanenbaum writes, the "ideologically-infused debates about Roth reignited, with the battle cry no longer 'What is he saying about the Jews' but 'What is he saying about America? About "the sixties"?" (2004, 42). Examining the Swede's narrative of America as well as Merry's radical critique of that narrative, most critical discourse indeed focuses on where Roth stands in regard to the decade of the sixties. Critics' responses to Roth's representation of the sixties are divided. Robert Boyers, for instance, criticizes Roth's reduction of the sixties to a time of irrational violence, and "the movements of the '60s," such as "opposition to the Vietnam War and participation in the civil rights movement," to "an undifferentiated cartoon of adolescent rebellion" (1997, 39). In contrast, Sandra Kumamoto Stanley views Merry as "a militant radical who articulates what Roth describes as the 'counterpastoral' impulse, the 'demonic reality'" (2005, 2). Similarly, Clare Sigrist-Sutton argues that "the undercurrent of voices, black, colonized, and feminist, that would call [the American Dream] a lie," exists within the text "as reverberations, sounding through the counter-voice of Merry" (2010, 49). Critical readings such as these, however, with their primary focus being the sixties, radical activism, the Swede, and Merry (who disappears from the novel in the early seventies), tend to ignore important aspects of the novel, especially issues of race and class.

As Roy Goldblatt points out, Roth depicts the changes in the ethnoracial position of "Newark Jews" from "Other to in-between and later to white" (2006, 87).² The novel opens with the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, expressing his adoration of his childhood hero and explaining how the Swede—"so flawlessly Americanized" with a "Viking mask," blue eyes, and blond hair (AP 3)—was idolized in the 1940s Jewish community in Newark; a legendary all-around high-school athlete, the Swede fulfills a dream of "total assimilation," an idol through whom they "fantasize about the America of which they were still not fully part" (Goldblatt 2006, 95). "He'd done it," Zuckerman acclaims (AP 15). Returning home after World War II, the Swede married a *shiksa*, Irish Catholic Dawn Dwyer, moved to a WASP suburb, Old Rimrock, and became part of a

particularly white America. When Zuckerman meets the Swede in 1995, he expects to hear about the story of his life in Old Rimrock, but instead the Swede tells him how Newark Maid, his glove factory, and the entire city of Newark have been affected by the 1967 riots and the changes that followed. Zuckerman "couldn't imagine him at all" (30), hearing these exteriors of his life. He later meets the Swede's brother, Jerry, and hears about the Swede's death and "The 'Rimrock Bomber,'" Merry (68). Zuckerman's first-person narration soon recedes behind third-person limited narration, which, for the rest of the novel, reconstructs the story of the Swede after moving to Old Rimrock, from the Swede's point of view. It emphasizes how Merry's radicalization and her bomb affect the Swede and his ideal home, but it also recounts in detail the story of Newark Maid, Newark, and the 1967 riots from the perspective of the Swede, who has an "unconscious oneness with America" (20) and lives by "virtue of his isomorphism to the Wasp world" (89). Roth, that is, no longer writes exclusively about Jews in *American Pastoral*, or the America represented through the Swede and Merry and the sixties: he also addresses America's larger racial issues.

What Roth says about America is not limited to the sixties. Setting *American Pastoral* in Newark, he carefully interweaves the city's history from the 1940s to the 1990s, including the racial and class divisions between the city and suburbs, the 1967 Newark riots, and their continuing, ruinous effects on the city. He contrasts the protagonist's idealized vision of America as a wealthy WASP suburb with a poor city that functions as "a black colony" (165). African American workers at Newark Maid, located in the city, generate profits under exploitative capitalism and financially sustain the Swede's pastoral home, but they are only present in the city, excluded from pastoral suburbs and the American Dream, and they are later replaced with cheaper workers at his Puerto Rican factory. These African Americans are an important group that offers a counterreality to the Swede's narrative. Yet Roth underrepresents their voices in a layered rhetoric. He gives a voice to Vicky, a black female worker at Newark Maid who stays next to the Swede during the riots and speaks a few words, but African Americans and their voices are represented mainly through the Swede, whose narrative is contained in the voice of Zuckerman.

The novel's complicated narrative structure might raise questions. Do the marginalized voices of Vicky and African Americans point to the limits of a white author who represents a racial other? Does Roth not work hard enough to develop this black character? Does he ultimately support the Swede and his perception of America? I interrogate this

underrepresentation as a means by which Roth critically represents America and the novel's larger concern with race relations in the United States. Contextualizing the novel within Newark and the nation's history, and analyzing the changing representation of African Americans from the 1940s to the 1990s, I examine how Roth challenges the Swede's innocence, as well as the nation's innocence, ironically, through the minimized voices of Vicky and African Americans, which point to contradictions and omissions within the Swede's narrative, criticizing the willful insistence on American *innocence*—the ignorance of racial history and reality—and the idealized vision of America despite the antipastoral reality lived by African Americans. Moreover, considering perspectives of African Americans and Zuckerman, whose buried critique also reveals blind spots and contradictions within the Swede's narrative, I examine how Roth's descriptions of Old Rimrock, Newark Maid, and Newark unmask the effaced realities underlying the American pastoral myth and the myth of the American Dream: the exclusion of African Americans, the racial and class divisions, and exploitative capitalism.

Roth wrote the original draft of *American Pastoral*, entitled *How the Other Half Lives*, in the early seventies (RP 39.1–2). It consists of three chapters and tells the story of Milton Levov and Merry in New Jersey and a woman named Anne Frank in Czechoslovakia. This original draft mainly describes Merry's bombing in 1968, its aftermath, and the effects on her father and his ideal home. Roth's preliminary notes about the second part abroad—which is mostly about Anne Frank, a girl with the same name as the emblematic Jewish Holocaust victim, and the struggles with the aftermath of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—suggest that he wanted to examine European Jewish history and explore the sixties from a comparative perspective. However, when Roth revised the draft, he retitled it *American Pastoral* and wrote its first draft in 1995, situating it solely in New Jersey and beginning in the postwar period.

The word "pastoral" commonly denotes simple rural life, but, as Derek Parker Royal points out, "in the case with Old Rimrock," American pastoral refers to "notions of an idealized America, innocent and uncomplicated by contradictions or ambiguities" that could take "the form of references to a simple agrarian society, American exceptionalism, ahistorical readings of race, and of course the 'American Dream' in all of its manifestations" (2005, 204). The American pastoral myth shapes the national ideals and identity that coincided with the ideologies underlying the nation's founding: a new, previously unmapped space was to be a home for Americans, who could achieve the American Dream.³ America,

however, could only create and maintain such an idealized vision by overriding contradictions and ambiguities: slavery, territorial wars against Mexico, and the brutal violence its founders employed to conquer a land inhabited by indigenous people. Even the American Dream, whose core concepts are equal opportunity and upward social and economic mobility resulting from individual will and hard work, systemically excluded certain groups of Americans like Native Americans, women, and enslaved people. Despite these conflicting realities, in the mid-twentieth century, strengthened by postwar optimism, the positive definition of America was firmly reestablished and consolidated as a national mythology, as pointed out by Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955), and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), and it continues to be reproduced in present-day America. But the continuing struggles of and among minority groups to become socially white and the perpetual social and economic marginality of African Americans point to the continuing privilege of whiteness and the structural barriers embedded in the American Dream.⁴

American Pastoral posits the postwar period as a time characterized by an upsurge of energy and a sense of unlimited possibilities, a time when "Americans were to start over again, en masse, everyone in it together. . . , the clock of history reset and a whole people's aims limited no longer by the past. . . . You must not come to nothing! *Make something of yourselves!*" (40–41). In this period, the Swede works hard, attains upward social mobility, and lives and apparently validates the American Dream. Seemingly, he embodies the American Adam, "the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (Lewis [1955] 1971, 1). The Swede's ideal home in an edenic suburb and a Newark "bright with industriousness" (*AP* 41), however, decline through three chapters: "Paradise Remembered," "The Fall," and "Paradise Lost." Roth, moreover, begins his modern epic about the American pastoral myth and the myth of the American Dream with the phrase, "The Swede," signaling that his modern American Adam is white, and in contextualizing the Swede's move to Old Rimrock within postwar suburbanization, Roth explores the persistent dark undercurrent that lies beneath the myths and gives a face to those who have been excluded.

The suburban home, as "the central repository for what many considered 'the good life,'" became "central to the American Dream during the postwar years" (Samuel 2012, 56). Examining Jewish Americans' social and economic upward mobility and the suburban boom during this period, Karen Brodtkin regards the postwar period

as “a historic moment for real class mobility” (1998, 37) when Federal programs and GI benefits promoted “mass entry into a middle-class, home-owning suburban lifestyle. Together they raised the American standard of living to a middle-class one” (46). However, she challenges the postwar optimism as well as the “myth that Jews pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps” (50), emphasizing that federal housing policies and GI programs created the conditions for social mobility for whites and people who had newly become white, such as Jews and other eastern and southern European immigrants. The programs were affirmative action that “aimed at and disproportionately helped male, Euro-origin GIs” (38)⁵ and “effectively denied African American GIs access to their benefits” (43). The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), like its predecessor the Home Owners Loan Cooperation (HOLC), practiced “systematic redlining” (49). Although restrictive covenants were outlawed in 1948, the FHA “publicly and actively promoted restrictive covenants” throughout its history and its “underwriting manuals openly insisted on racially homogenous neighborhoods, and their loans were made only in white neighborhoods” (47). These housing programs made it impossible to get a mortgage in a racially mixed neighborhood and made it virtually impossible for African Americans to borrow money for home purchase or improvement.⁶ While the postwar boom and its benefits were mostly applicable to whites, African Americans were decidedly shut out of the suburban boom and excluded from partaking in postwar prosperity.

As Brodtkin points out, such housing policies and GI programs had two sides. On the one hand, they contributed to “the larger postwar whitening of Jews and other eastern and southern Europeans” and diminished “intra-white racialization.” On the other, they “reinforced white/nonwhite racial distinctions” (1998, 50), exacerbating prior racial segregation and discrimination. Postwar suburbs comprised of residents with various Euro-ethnic origins were the visual indicators of this polarity. They often became “the measure of American democracy’s victory over racism” (36), but they also emblemized the nation’s racism, for they were a product of the systematic exclusion of African Americans. Moreover, while suburbs grew, cities became deserted and ghettoized through urban renewal, which made postwar cities less desirable places in which to live.⁷ The people who could not afford to leave, who had newly arrived in the city, or who were forced to stay as the result of unfair housing programs, were mostly African Americans, who were trapped in increasingly desolate urban environments. Postwar suburbanization thus produced white suburbs and black cities, which were divided not only by race but also by class.⁸

Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*

Newark and its history vividly illustrate the effects of suburbanization and urban renewal. According to Nathan Wright, Jr., the gradual increase in white flight to the Newark suburbs entailed an industrial exodus, caused an increase in urban unemployment, and led to the city's deterioration. This change was accompanied by an increasing influx of black migrants, who moved from the South to Newark after World War II. Newark's demography thus changed from "a typical American city of a white population preponderance in 1940 to one that had an estimated 47–65 percent black majority in 1967" (1968, 13). As Wright sees it, facing "the precipitous black migration to Newark,"

the white population has moved in two directions. It has moved into the suburbs; and it has entrenched itself in several sections of the city. . . . Seven of Newark's twelve neighborhoods have reflected a pattern of white entrenchment or a holding of the line against an "invasion" by the growing black population. These communities form almost a complete ring around the central core of Newark where the overwhelming majority of the city's black population resides. (17)

These black migrants initially settled in the city temporarily, hoping to move on to better jobs and futures. Yet they found it difficult to escape the city's steady economic decline and were often stuck in a "typical big city black slum" (39) such as the Central Ward.

According to Kevin Mumford, uneven growth and the income gap between the suburb and the inner city had gradually increased since the 1940s, and by the middle of the 1950s, "this dualism of white suburb and black city" was impossible to ignore: "70 percent of the state's population with the lowest income lived in the urban core" in Newark, which according to a 1956 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* was "a vast scrawl of Negro slums and poverty, a festering center of disease, vice, injustice, crime" (2007, 52). Brad Tuttle further details how large-scale postwar urban renewal and public housing programs devastated the urban environment of Newark (2009, 119–41). Instead of clearing "the most blighted ghettos, such as in the largely African American Central Ward" (129), the Newark Housing Authority redeveloped "a sufficiently decent neighborhood—and plainly one where whites were the majority—to attract developers" (130), and where FHA officials were more likely to agree to insure mortgages for construction. Postwar urban renewal thus accelerated Italian, Jewish, and other white residents' abandonment of Newark and flight to suburban towns, or their entrenchment in the

city—while public houses were built that would be, as Tuttle entitles his chapter, “The Slums of Ten Years from Now,” whose residents would be mostly African American.

American Pastoral explores the structural racism inherent in postwar suburbanization. When the Swede, an ex-GI, joins a weekly touch-football game at the house of his neighbor and long-time Old Rimrock resident, Bill Orcutt, he meets “Orcutt’s local friends and some other fellows like the Swede, ex-GIs from around Essex County trickling out with new families to the wide-open spaces” (AP 312). The Swede’s move points to the larger postwar whitening of European immigrants and the diminishing of “intrawhite racialization,” but at the same time it alludes to a widened white and nonwhite division. For the Swede, “Old Rimrock is,” as Royal puts it, “a pastoral ideal, a place where he and Dawn can escape their strictly ethnic upbringing . . . and melt into the de-ethnicized pot of the larger American society” (2005, 189). It does not, however, transcend racial lines.⁹ Rather, this seemingly race-neutral suburb, where “the Swede” lives “unapologetically as an equal among equals” (AP 85), is filled with racial assumptions and imperatives. Its suburban equality is racially restricted to whites: a WASP suburb with a history of violent exclusion of African Americans, Old Rimrock is “a narrow, bigoted area. The Klan thrived out here in the twenties” (309).

Significantly, the novel does not land the Swede in one of the new, massive, postwar suburbs designed for veterans and second- and third-generation immigrants and functioning as breeding grounds for ethnic Americans on their way from in-betweenness to whiteness.¹⁰ As Kathy Knapp argues, instead of “taking up residence in one of the new, suburban ranch-style incubators for assimilation, the Jewish American Swede . . . locates himself among the established landed gentry,” moving to “the idyllic WASP enclave of Old Rimrock” (2014, 92). He enters the long-established, privileged suburb where Orcutt, whose family history “goes back to the Revolution,” lives (AP 304). A latecomer, the Swede revives the American pastoral myth, buying a farm with a 170-year-old house and streams, and raising horses and cows. Here the Swede identifies with Johnny Appleseed, whom he considers to be the archetype of an American: “Johnny Appleseed, that’s the man for me. Wasn’t a Jew, wasn’t an Irish Catholic, wasn’t a Protestant Christian—nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American. Big. Ruddy. Happy. No brains probably, but didn’t need ’em—a great walker was all Johnny Appleseed needed to be. All physical joy” (316). The suburb exemplifies the Swede’s ideal America: a compact community that still adheres to an archaic American lifestyle.

It is the home for *real* Americans: Applesseed, the earlier European settlers, their descendants, and him.

The Swede lives in Old Rimrock not as a Jewish American but as a “post-Jewish” man (AP 73) and a white American.¹¹ He is “at home here the way the Wasps were at home here, an American not by sheer striving, not by being a Jew who invents a famous vaccine or a Jew on the Supreme Court, not by being the most brilliant or the most eminent or the best. Instead—by virtue of his isomorphism to the Wasp world—he does it the ordinary way, the natural way, the regular American-guy way” (89). The Swede’s American life is only possible within a geographically restricted area, out “here,” moving from a multiethnic urban space to a racially homogeneous, white space. Replicating the life WASPs lived in the past, he immerses himself into the legacies and ideologies of earlier white Americans. Knapp argues that the Swede, as part of a generation credited with resetting “the clock of history” (AP 41), “claims for himself a role in the foundational national fairy tale of the self-reliant subject who charts his own journey across the limitless frontier,” but his arrival in Old Rimrock does not, as he claims it does, signal the advent of “a new man for a new world order” (Knapp 2014, 92). Although he differentiates himself from Orcutt, who inherits “wealth and privilege associated with the old guard of WASP elites,” he himself inherits the glove manufacturing business from his father. The relation between Newark Maid and Old Rimrock reveals that he still lives by an old order, and how an American past persists.

Newark Maid is located in Newark, and most of “this factory’s employees are NEGROES” (AP 161). The African Americans function as hard, reliable workers at the glove factory in the fifties, but their labor is not rewarded with the achievement of the American Dream, and there is no American pastoral vision in the novel for them. The novel represents the upward social and economic mobility of immigrant groups through their geographical movement to a better neighborhood. For example, poor, newly arriving immigrants live in Down Neck, “where each fresh wave of immigrants first settled” (12), while earlier comers become more Americanized and move to better neighborhoods. Likewise, Jewish Americans move from “the Polish shtetl their Yiddish-speaking parents had re-created around Prince Street in the impoverished Third Ward” to Keer Avenue “where the rich Jews lived” (10), to the suburbs. African Americans are an exception to this movement. Rather, corresponding to the city’s social and economic decline, the situation of African Americans deteriorates, as indicated by the Swede’s changing representations of them:

workers in the fifties, looters and rioters during the 1967 riots, and car thieves in the nineties. Their socioeconomic conditions worsen, and they gradually lose sight of the Dream and end up trapped in a declining city, which, once their workplace—and, according to the historical account of Newark, mentioned earlier, their counterpastoral home—becomes a site of riots.

The Swede in Old Rimrock and the African Americans in the city are geographically separated by race and class. The novel, however, highlights the complex socioeconomic interaction between them. Unlike Marx's portrayal of a pastoral America in *The Machine in the Garden*—an idyllic garden destroyed by the intrusion of machines and industrialism—Roth's American pastoral is based on industrialism and materialism. The Swede creates his pastoral home and builds Dawn's farm in suburban Old Rimrock by purchasing high-end commodities associated with nostalgic and pastoral sentiments, such as an expensive farmhouse and pedigreed cows and horses, thereby "own[ing] a piece of America" (AP 315). His modern pastoral is a result of conspicuous consumption. His cows, for instance, are expensive consumer goods featured in catalogs and advertisements in papers and magazines, delivered to Dawn, a rich customer, in order to attract her to shows, sales, and auctions. She loves auctions, and though she "bought carefully, her pleasure just in raising her hand and topping the previous bid was serious pleasure" (199). Although Dawn works hard to maintain her farm, it hardly yields a profit. It is Newark Maid, dependent on the labor of black workers, that produces the wealth that maintains the Swede's idealized rural life and sustains his family's consumerism. His seemingly preindustrial pastoral life is directly related to and built on a capitalist present: the factory and the labor of African Americans in Newark.

The Swede and his father, Lou, praise and miss the "beloved old Newark," which "manufactured everything" (24). This is where they feel they achieved their self-made American Dream through hard work. The Swede also idealizes the Newark Maid glove factory, where the traditional way of making leather gloves has been preserved, comparing it to "a little family-run shop in Naples or Grenoble" (127). However, the novel exposes an intrinsic problem in the nostalgic vision of the city and factory work. Zuckerman's memory of how things were produced in Newark is telling: Newark had "soft water, good water" to make beer and leather, so that it had "big breweries, big tanneries, and, for the immigrant, lots of wet, smelly, crushing work" (11).¹² As Marshall Bruce Gentry puts it, "When one returns to the beginning of the book to recall the supposed

glory days of leather making in Newark," it is not nostalgic but "a vision of hell" ([2000] 2005, 164):

The tannery that stank of both the slaughterhouse and the chemical plant from the soaking of flesh and the cooking of flesh and the dehairing and pickling and degreasing of hides, where round the clock in the summertime the blowers drying the thousands and thousands of hanging skins raised the temperature in the low-ceilinged dry room to a hundred and twenty degrees, where the vast vat rooms were dark as caves and flooded with swill, where brutish workingmen, heavily aproned, armed with hooks and staves, dragging and pushing overloaded wagons, wringing and hanging waterlogged skins, were driven like animals through the laborious storm that was a twelve-hour shift—a filthy, stinking place. (AP 11–12)

Where Edward Alexander considers "the productive labor in the glove factory" as "the truly potent [critique] of sixties radicalism" (1999, 185), Boyers argues that the "nostalgia for the 'country-that-used-to-be' is so palpable in this novel that it virtually immobilizes the imagination of reality" (1997, 40). But the vision of the tannery above rebukes both readings, outlining what made Newark a manufacturers' paradise: the exploitative labor of workers.

The depiction of the interior of the Swede's glove factory also undercuts his romanticized view of factory work. When he guides Rita Cohen, Merry's comrade, through Newark Maid, he introduces her to Harry, who has been "forty-one years with Newark Maid" (AP 126). The presence of this long-standing employee seems to confirm the Swede's ideal view of Newark Maid. However, the novel emphasizes the contrast between his enthusiastic description and Harry's indifference and nonstop work. While the Swede's near-monologue takes up almost two pages, in which he explains how he learned to cut a glove from Harry and tells a story of how Harry's father got free circus tickets, Harry is "indifferent to his boss's words" (126) and continues his work. Occasionally nodding in response "without stopping his work," Harry speaks only to correct his boss regarding the name of the newspaper that published his father's story and to mention that his father "couldn't speak a word of English" (128). The novel suggests a reason for Harry's nonreaction. A few pages earlier, there is a description of little Merry and her classmates' field trip to the factory, during which she mentions, "People cheating on piece rates is always a problem. My daddy had to fire one man. He was stealing time"

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(122). This scene suggests how the factory is not “a little family-run shop” but a place where workers labor to produce maximum profit within the given time. They can be fired and replaced by other workers who can generate more profit. Indeed, eventually they are all replaced by cheaper Puerto Rican workers.

The Swede and Lou blame African Americans for the 1967 Newark riots, which they claim made large manufacturers move abroad and led to the downfall of their beloved city. The Swede stresses that even after manufacturers fled the city, he wanted to stay and “hung on for some six years after the ’67 riots. . . . But when he was unable to stop the erosion of the workmanship, which had deteriorated steadily since the riots, he’d given up, managing to get out more or less unharmed by the city’s collapse” (24). By belittling Newark workers and blaming the erosion of their skills on the riots, the Swede justifies moving his factory to Puerto Rico and describes himself as a victim of the riots. However, the Swede himself suggests that this exodus was already occurring prior to the eruption of the riots, mentioning that the first manufacturer left Gloversville, New York, and “went to the Philippines to make gloves” in the early fifties (27). Lou corroborates this story by pointing out that “General Electric already moved out in 1953,” and every big employer left Newark “*before the riots, before the racial hatred*” (345). Although Newark Maid as a whole did not move to Puerto Rico until “the early seventies” (24), it opened one factory there “in 1958” (14). The blame the Swede places on the riots—and on black workers—for the need to move the factory is thus anachronistic.

Explaining why he decided to move Newark Maid, the Swede reveals his real motives: “The unions had made it more and more difficult for a manufacturer to make any money, you could hardly find people to do that kind of piecework anymore, or to do it the way you wanted it done, and elsewhere there was an availability of workers who could be trained nearly to the standards that had been obtained in the glove industry forty and fifty years ago” (24). The Swede produced the gloves in Newark because African American workers at Newark Maid offered cheap labor, but when labor prices rose, he moved his factory to Puerto Rico, where unregulated labor pools were easily exploited and conveniently out of sight, and where gloves could be produced in a way and with low wages no longer possible in Newark. Zuckerman’s description of the tannery and glove factory work in old Newark, mentioned earlier, hints at the likely poor working conditions and low payment in the Puerto Rican factory, which, despite its temporally advanced setting, replicates old patterns of exploitation.

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By "the eighties, though, even Puerto Rico began to grow expensive and about everybody but Newark Maid fled to wherever in the Far East the labor force was abundant and cheap, to the Philippines first, then Korea and Taiwan, and now to China" (26). The Swede's decision to stay in Puerto Rico seems to differentiate him from "everybody" else who moved from nation to nation, greedily seeking cheaper labor and replacing workers. The novel does reveal that the Swede stays in Puerto Rico because he had trained many good people there, "but also, he had to admit, staying on because his [new] family so much enjoyed the vacation home he'd built some fifteen years ago on the Caribbean coast" (28), located near his Ponce plant. The Puerto Rican factory, replacing Newark Maid, provides the material basis for building another home for his new family and extends the pastoral dream in a colonial direction. The Swede's pastoral ideal and his American Dream persist at the expense of an economic periphery and its people's labor.

The Swede rejects Merry and Rita's accusation against him as a capitalist, racist, and imperialist, saying, "You don't know what a factory is, you don't know what manufacturing is, you don't know what capital is, you do not know what labor is. . . . You have no idea what *work* is. . . . You wouldn't last a single day, not as a worker, not as a manager, not as an owner" (135). Yet Roth represents the Swede's two factories as the very places where their accusations against the Swede prove real. In notes on Angela Davis, Roth transcribed what she said about racism and imperialism: "Racism, in the first place, is a weapon used by the wealthy to increase the profits they bring in—by paying Black workers less for their work" and imperialism means the "ruling class of one country conquers the people of another in order to rob them of their land, their resources, and to exploit their labor" (Davis 1974, 61, 62; RP 51.1). In *American Pastoral*, Newark Maid and its workers, most of whom are "NEGROES" (161), reveal the systematic practice of racism under capitalism, while the Swede's Puerto Rican factory and the exodus of other manufacturers abroad for cheaper labor suggest in an era of global capitalism the domestic racial economic structure is expanded and transformed into imperialism.

The Swede clings to his idea of Old Rimrock as an idealized American setting that dates back to the Revolutionary War, but Roth ironizes the Swede's sense of himself resetting "the clock of history." As Knapp points out, although "the story that the Swede narrates to himself. . . hearkens back to a particular version of the nation's imagined history," his success depends on the present, material reality, "the hard

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labor of others, first in Newark, then in Puerto Rico" (2014, 92, 93), and finally elsewhere to offer abundant and cheap labor. Although the Swede is not aware of it, the black workers indeed do connect Old Rimrock with Appleseed's old America. Appleseed was a white man living in an America sustained by an exploitative and vicious system of slavery. A happy twentieth-century American lives in a modern pastoral space, a WASP suburb, that depends on the exploitation of black laborers in Newark, evincing "the anticipated American future that was simply to have unrolled out of the solid American past" (AP 85). Merry and Rita emphasize the historical continuity of the preexisting racial economic structures, comparing Newark Maid to a plantation under "paternal capitalism" (135) and Newark to "a black colony" (165). The relation between Old Rimrock and Newark reveals a relation between whiteness and class deep-rooted in American society, as it is in a colony, where, according to Frantz Fanon, "the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" ([1961] 2004, 5).

Placing alongside African Americans not Merry but the Swede and Lou, Roth adds a complication. Although they know the factory work, they once worked with African Americans, and they lived in Newark, they do not see what Merry sees: the racial injustice and exploitation they live within and reproduce. The novel thus raises critical questions. How can they be so blind to racism? How can the Swede's pastoral suburban vision of America coexist unproblematically with African American reality? Roth addresses such questions by identifying the Swede's and Lou's responses to the 1967 Newark riots with those of white Newarkers, the national media, and the nation.

In a speech he delivered three months before the Newark riots, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. warned that "about 10 cities in the nation," including Newark, "are 'powder kegs' which may explode into race riots this summer" ("Dr. King" 1967). As King presaged, on July 12, 1967, police brutality toward black cab driver John Smith sparked riots in Newark's black community. The term "riots" commonly refers to an abrupt and irrational outbreak of violence, but the widely predicted 1967 Newark riots grew out of long-standing racial injustice in the United States—out of the conflicting simultaneous constructs of pastoral suburban utopia and inner-city ghetto.¹³ And responses to the riots suggested the extreme degree to which racism had been ignored by white Americans. Governor Richard J. Hughes asked a commission to investigate the circumstances leading to the riots, for instance, and

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according to the *Report for Action* that was produced, the responses diverged by race, as if "attitudinally, whites and Negroes are in two almost separate worlds" (*Report* 1968, 2):

The survey found sharp disagreement among Negroes and whites on the causes of the riots:

Specifically, the Negroes put these elements at the top of the list of causes of the riots:

Bad housing.

Unemployment among Negroes.

Breaking of official promises.

Lack of job opportunities.

Overcrowding of Negro areas.

Police brutality.

None of the above items is given significant mention by whites as a cause of the riots. Rather, whites select these items, which ironically are at the bottom of the list for Negroes:

Outside troublemakers.

Criminals and hoodlums.

The search for excitement. (3)

The riots were conducted by members of a very specific race; however, white Newarkers viewed the riots as abrupt, irrational uprisings and criminal and pathological behavior committed by bad individuals: these people were the problem, the cause of the riots. Such views reflected the widespread social and historical contextlessness of white understandings of the riots.

The national media and the nation reinforced white Newarkers' views. As Mumford writes, "The national press characterized the riots as a tragedy, in which violent and criminal black residents wantonly attacked heroic law enforcement" and "the *New York Times* quoted the governor's characterization of the events as 'criminal insurrection,' and routinely used the term 'terrorists' to refer to 'Negroes' in the riots" (2007, 144). In focusing on the criminality of the rioters and the abruptness of the violence, the media did not address racism or discrimination against African Americans as an underlying cause, but the society's prevailing racial issues enter the accounts through racialized descriptions of rioters as violent and criminal "Negroes." The government responded in similar fashion, characterizing the riots as mere acts of violence, destruction, and looting rather than as civil disorder or a form of protest against socioeconomic problems related to racism. Yet tanks and armed troops

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were sent to suppress *black* “terrorists” and to enforce social control over *black* Newarkers. In their attempt to quell disorder, law enforcement officers, who were mostly white, carried out racist acts. They “broke the glass, robbed, or shot their guns” at commercial property and businesses that were “emblazoned with ‘SOUL BROTHER’ or other messages of African American solidarity” and had been left intact by rioters (Tuttle 2009, 165).¹⁴ Roth’s reading material on the riots—newspaper articles from the *Newark Evening News* published on July 14, 1967, and the *Newark Sunday News* published July 16, 1967, and an unidentified clipping attached to the galley proofs¹⁵—addresses all these issues (RP 51.3; 50.5–6). In *American Pastoral* Roth reconstructs the riots, depicting the polarized responses by race through Lou, the Swede, and Vicky.

Although Lou and his son achieve the American Dream as a result of African Americans’ labor at Newark Maid, Lou downplays their contribution to his success and criticizes them as destroyers of his achievement. “I built this with my *hands*!” he insists, “With my blood! They think somebody gave it to me? Who? Who gave it to me? Who gave me anything, ever? Nobody! What I have I built! With work—w-o-r-k! But they took that city and now they are going to take that business and everything that I built up a day at a time, an *inch* at a time, and they are going to leave it *all* in ruins!” (AP 163–64). According to the Swede, African Americans were good and skilled workers, at least before the riots, and Lou worked with these African Americans, but the question of why their hard work has not been rewarded by social mobility simply does not occur to Lou. For Lou, as Goldblatt argues, “African Americans are lazy, unskilled, destructive shirkers, who want things handed to them” and who have “not internalized the white values of industry, ambition, hard work, and delayed gratification embraced by the Jewish model minority (2006, 97). Lou characterizes the riots as acts of pure destruction and African American rioters as pathological antagonists of the city. For him, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka)—who represents black activism and political voices in Newark and addressed the urban frustration, fury, and despair of African Americans stirring up the riots—is a depraved, merely individual destroyer of the affluent city: “A whole business is going down the drain because of that son of a bitch LeRoi Jones” (AP 163). And African American rioters are the ones who self-destructively burn down their own houses, turn a great city into “a total nowhere” (164), and deserve to live in the ruins they create.

Like his Jewish American friends, Lou pathologizes racial upheaval, blaming another minority group and its poverty, differentiating themselves

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from “the schvartzes” (164, 165).¹⁶ Lou’s response suggests not simply a character’s racist attitude or the conflict between two minority groups but also the novel’s exploration of “model minority” discourse that was first deployed in the 1960s, reproducing preexisting racial stereotypes and assumptions.¹⁷ Celebrating the upward mobility not only of Asian Americans but also of other racial or ethnic minority groups, including Jewish Americans, this discourse “foists responsibility for a group’s success, failure, and recovery from historical discrimination on the shoulders of the group itself, rather than the larger society” (Bascara 2008, 910). That is, a “model minority’s success, such as cultural assimilation and class mobility, is seen to be caused by characteristics that make that group a group in the first place.” This discourse fails to critically interrogate or challenge the current social order and existing systems and regulations. Rather, they are regarded as “a means for effecting social change” that minority groups accept and assimilate, “putatively” rejecting “outside agitators” who resist and protest the current systems (911). Such a discourse is especially harmful to African Americans, as their persistent poverty and lower economic and social position can be identified as their own fault, a shortcoming that defines the group, and their resistance to and rejection of the current system is read as the scheme of “outside agitators.” African Americans are the group that model minorities pit themselves against to move toward success and whiteness. Model minority discourse helps illuminate Lou’s response to the black rioters, which coincides with that of white Newarkers and the nation at large. It also suggests how firmly racial prejudice and structure against African Americans is structured into society and how fomented racism serves to pit minority groups against each other even amid Civil Rights protests, maintaining and reproducing the established racism and racial structure.

Regarding Lou’s and the Swede’s descriptions of the riots and black rioters, Boyers argues that the novel asks readers to “believe” and “accept” them (1997, 40), but Roth in fact undermines their views, depicting them as partial and inconsistent. While Lou blames black rioters and depicts the riots as irrational and abrupt, as a successful businessman intimately acquainted with the city’s economic conditions, he nevertheless also reveals the real causes behind the riots. “In Newark,” he says, “corruption is the name of the game”:

What is new, number one, is race; number two, taxes. . . . Everyone of them big employers, and *before* the riots, *before* the racial hatred, they got out. Race is just the icing on the cake. Streets aren’t

cleaned. Burned-out cars nobody takes away. People in abandoned buildings. Fires in abandoned buildings. Unemployment. Filth. Poverty. More filth. More poverty. . . . And I told this to Seymour. "Newark is the next Watts." . . . "The summer of '67." I predicted it in those very words. . . . Manufacturing is finished in Newark. *Newark* is finished. The riots were just as bad if not worse in Washington, in Los Angeles, in Detroit. But, mark my words, Newark will be the city that never comes back. (AP 345)

In sequence, Lou lists the chronic problems of Newark that came to a head during the "predicted" riots. Even before the riots, Newark was not a great city. Although the riots accelerated industrial flight, the mass exodus had already begun, aggravating the urban deterioration that eventually sparked the riots. The causal relation he asserts between the manufacturers' mass exodus and the riots thus contradicts Lou's descriptions of the riots as irrational, and his victim narrative.

In Lou's description of the riots, moreover, race plays an inconsistent role. Even as he racializes the rioters, linking aggression and depravity to skin color, he minimizes racism as a reason for the riots, arguing that "race is just the icing on the cake" and describing the riots as local events resulting from conditions specific to the city, such as taxes and corruption. However, the riots in Washington, Detroit, and Los Angeles in the sixties indicate the Newark riots were clearly not isolated events. They all had common causes: discrimination against African Americans and the structural relation between race and poverty.¹⁸ When Lou lists the effects on the city of the big manufacturers' exodus, he does not mention that African Americans were the group most affected by the deterioration of the urban environment. Through this omission, he casts black Newarkers as irrational instruments of destruction, not as its victims.

Roth's novel also reveals the limits and contradictions within the Swede's description of the rioters. The Swede stays at Newark Maid during the riots to protect the factory and provides an eyewitness account:

Snipers from rooftops blasting the street lights, looting crowds crazed in the streets, kids carrying off radios and lamps and television sets, men toting armfuls of clothing, women pushing baby carriages heavily loaded with cartons of liquor and cases of beer, people pushing pieces of new furniture right down the center of the street, stealing sofas, cribs, kitchen tables, stealing washers and dryers and ovens—stealing not in the shadows but out in the open. . . . *This* is shoplifting. Everything free that

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everyone craves, a wanton free-for-all free of charge, everyone uncontrollable with thinking, Here it is! (268)

Echoing the national media's reports of the riots, including the unproven claim that "snipers hiding on roofs even opened fire on fire houses" (Mumford 2007, 143), the Swede describes them as sprees of looting and stealing from random stores. Hoping to prevent the rioters from destroying the city and his property, the Swede waits for the National Guard and the "police with pistols, for soldiers with submachine guns" (AP 269). He supports the introduction of military force to suppress the riots, reporting that "those tanks put a stop to what could have been total disaster" (162).

Contrary to the Swede's expectations, after armed law enforcement troops arrive, the riots become more violent and destructive, not less, resulting in an increased death toll. As the Swede himself describes it:

A police car opens fire into the bar across the street, out his window he sees a woman go down, buckle and go down, shot dead right on the street, a woman killed in front of his eyes. . . . People screaming, shouting, firemen pinned to the ground by gunfire so they cannot fight the flames; explosions, the sound suddenly of bongo drums, in the middle of the night a volley of pistol shots blowing out every one of the street-level windows displaying Vicky's signs. (AP 269)

The Swede depicts the riots as purely random, and chaotic. Yet, for example, even the sound of bongo drums, which might seem to suggest the riots' irrationality, refers to a racially meaningful event Roth read about and marked in David C. Berliner's "Three Dead in City Riots: Mobs Loot, Start Fires," published in the *Newark Evening News* on July 14, 1967: soon after 8:20 pm on Wednesday, July 12, "a large crowd began gathering two blocks away [from the police station where John Smith was arrested] around a youth playing a bongo drum" (RP 51.3). The inclusion of this ominous, rallying, and specifically African American sound reverberates the racial meanings that remain hidden in the Swede's account.

Moreover, although the Swede makes it seem as if all African Americans joined in the looting and destruction, in fact Vicky stays at the factory with the Swede to protect it:

Vicky had made signs and stuck them where they would be visible, in Newark Maid's first floor windows, big white cardboard signs in black ink: "Most of this factory's employees are NEGROES." Two

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nights later every window with a sign displayed in it was shot out by a band of white guys, either vigilantes from north Newark or, as Vicky suspected, Newark cops in an unmarked car. They shot the windows out and drove away, and that was the total damage done to the Newark Maid factory during the days and nights when Newark was on fire. (AP 161–62)

That the only damage done to Newark Maid may have been by law enforcement officers contradicts the Swede's earlier positive account of law enforcement, and the effect of Vicky's window signs shows that the looting and rioting were not random, irrational acts. Discouraging black Newarkers from vandalizing the factory but provoking the white police, they suggest the racial tension underlying the riots.

Vicky, at the scene of the riots, offers a viewpoint of African Americans very different from the Swede's. She tries to prevent the National Guardsmen from damaging the city, enjoining them: "Think before you shoot into somebody's window! These [people] aren't 'snipers'! These are people! These are good people. Think!" (162). When a tank sits out in front of the factory, she knocks on the lid until it opens, and tells the soldiers inside, "Don't go crazy! People have to live here when you're gone. This place is their *home*!" Her reminder—the city is the African Americans' home—invites us to reconsider the Swede's narrative of victims in flight. He bemoans the fact that after the riots people "left, everyone, fled the smoldering rubble—manufacturers, retailers, the banks, the shop owners, the corporations, the department stores; in the South Ward, on the residential blocks, there are two moving vans per day on every street throughout the next year, homeowners fleeing, deserting the modest houses they treasure for whatever they can get" (269). For the Swede, "everyone" who left the city was a victim of the riots—but this "everyone" includes only those involved in commercial activities and homeowners. They are sorry for the destruction of the city and move their businesses or residences elsewhere. Vicky's words, in contrast, invoke other victims who are more severely affected by the riots, African Americans who stay behind, caught in the further destruction of the city. In his historical account, Michael Kimmage echoes Vicky's version of events: "The crucial history, symbolized in Newark's destruction, is the city's decline after the riots, the loss of neighborhood life and with it of communal memory, the loss of the Newark that immigrants had done much to build, the terrible reversal of fortune for those blacks who had migrated from the South in search of opportunity and whose

children are tied to a city in chronic decline, less able to leave than white Newarkers" (2012, 98). This historical fact of racially differentiated flight and abandonment is vital for understanding the novel's representation of African Americans in the later period.

The Swede's depictions of African Americans are devoid of any historical and social context that would illuminate their actions or transformations, so in each historical period they seem to appear abruptly, without any connection to previous times. After the Swede moves his factory to Puerto Rico, African Americans no longer appear as workers. Instead, in the nineties, they appear as car thieves and killers. The city is now "the car-theft capital of the world," the Swede complains, and the "thieves live mostly in our old neighborhood. Black kids. Forty cars stolen in Newark every twenty-four hours. . . . And they're murder weapons—once they're stolen, they're flying missiles. The target is anybody in the street—old people, toddlers, doesn't matter" (AP 24–25). When he mentions the deserted neighborhood Central Avenue, whose "major industry now is car-theft" (25), the Swede nostalgically recalls how great it was during his childhood, implying that it is the black children who have destroyed the neighborhood.

Tuttle's historical description of Newark matches the Swede's: "From the late 1980s through the early 1990s, Newark held the dubious distinction as 'the nation's car-theft capital.' Later, Newark became the 'carjacking capital of the world'; by 'November of 1992, 111 people had been killed that year in the Newark area in car-theft related incidents. Perhaps most disturbing, more than half the thieves in Newark were juveniles' (2009, 225). But Tuttle goes on to provide the context for this history:

Those children were increasingly likely to be poor, despite Newark's well-publicized revitalization. A study by the antipoverty group United Community Corporation [UCC] showed that the percentage of poor families in Newark rose in every ward between 1970 and 1990. . . . Of the thousands who had left the city, about three-quarters disappeared from the impoverished, predominantly black Central and South wards, which had respectively lost about ten thousand and twenty thousand residents. Newark's so-called renaissance hadn't touched these people, or the struggling poor who remained in the city. One photojournalist working in the mid and the late 1980s chose to document the Central Ward as the epitome of

a slum. . . .“Mostly, what I have seen reminds me of Dante’s inferno,” the journalist wrote, amid photos of dejected faces and filthy, graffiti-strewn apartments. (225–26)

The young black people the Swede rails against are thus most likely the descendants of those African Americans who were unable to leave and became tied to the city’s decline, which was accelerated following the riots, as their homes and communities became slums. These young people, who commit crimes, also have to live in this crime- and poverty-stricken urban area, suggesting the continuous, cumulative, and ruinous effects of the riots on the city and black migrants through the generations.

Despite her importance in representing an African American perspective on the riots, critics have barely examined Vicky as a source of counter-discourse. Throughout the novel, the African American presence is mainly filtered through the Levovs’ representations, in which black voices remain nearly silent. Roth seemingly makes an exception in the case of Vicky; nevertheless—in contrast to the Levovs’ blunt blaming of the black rioters—he allows Vicky to only make signs and speak a few words, and she does not directly narrate black Newarkers’ views or their abject realities. Thus, even when she interrupts the Swede at the site of the riots and offers her disparate point of view, her voice remains unheeded by most of Roth’s critics. Instead, for a counternarrative to the Swede’s, they turn to Merry. As a result, the issues of racism and the 1967 Newark riots have largely been glossed over or eclipsed by considerations of the sixties radicalism that Merry represents.

The underrepresentation of African American voices is, however, crucial for Roth’s perception of the sixties and, ultimately, for his critique of America as a whole. In *Reading Myself and Others*, talking about his 1973 novel, *The Great American Novel*, in a self-conducted interview, Roth depicts the sixties as a time when “the fierce, oftentimes wild and pathological assault [was] launched . . . against venerable American institutions and beliefs and, more to the point, [saw] the emergence of a counterhistory, or *countermythology*, to challenge the mythic sense of itself the country had” ([1975] 2001, 78). What he dramatizes in the novel is “the *struggle* between the benign national myth of itself that a great power prefers to perpetuate, and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly demonic reality (like the kind we had known in the sixties) that will not give an inch in behalf of that idealized mythology.” Regarding *American Pastoral*, this struggle between myth and countermyth is commonly examined in the relation between the Swede and Merry. Merry addresses the racial

issues in her critique of the Swede, and her bombing surely raises the issue of the other in regard to the Vietnam War and its brutal effect on a remote foreign country and its people, awareness of whom would not otherwise emerge in the Swede's American pastoral. However, by layering the novel with Newark's history, Roth depicts another, more long-lasting struggle within the nation, which came to a head in the sixties.

For African Americans, America was never a paradise or pastoral ideal, neither in ostensibly idyllic old America nor in the nostalgic post-World War-II period that the Swede imagines and remembers. Describing the Swede's simple and ordinary American life as "playing at being Wasps" out in a suburb that reproduces "Colonial old America" (AP 280), Roth evokes the nation's violent racial history and present, deymstifying the Swede's "false image" of the country: this "country is *frightening*" (276). Roth does this by underrepresenting the African American voices in the Swede's narrative of American pastoral. Even the riots, as an example of "the fierce, oftentimes wild and pathological assault" on "the mythic sense" of the nation, are mainly presented through the Swede's white narrative.¹⁹ In proposing that African American voices should be mediated and minimized in the idealized vision of the nation, his narrative simultaneously points to how closely African Americans are related to the antipastoral realities of the nation as well as to the great power and violence involved in repressing those voices to perpetuate "the benign national myth." Although their voices and perspectives are excluded from the national mythology on the surface of this narrative, the riots, Vicky, and contradictions and discordance within the Swede's narrative constantly evoke an erased and ignored countermythology and counterhistory, underscoring the Swede's, and the nation's, willful *innocence* of its own history and reality.

The Swede remains decidedly innocent, but the novel challenges him: "Everyone is against [the Levovs], everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!" (423). While leaving its protagonist lost and puzzled about why his daughter and his "secure Old Rimrock" go wrong, *American Pastoral*, the first volume of Roth's American trilogy, ends, confronting its readers with two questions: "And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" Here, Roth asks the reader whether a seemingly innocent life, ostensibly attained through individual effort, can in fact be reprehensible because of "America's black colonies, the inhumanity of the society, embattled humanity" (165) that are embedded in the American pastoral myth. Roth continues to engage

this question in the last volume of his American trilogy, *The Human Stain*, where Coleman Silk hides his African American identity behind his “lily-white face” ([2000] 2001, 81, 145), passes as white and Jewish by disconnecting himself from his black background, including his family, and lives as a “real” American, though his life falls apart after, ironically, being accused of racism against African Americans.

Criticizing Roth’s description of Merry, Todd Gitlin argues that “Roth’s failure to bring the sixties to life” seems “overdetermined” in the American literary tradition due to “some larger cultural blockage” or “a case of clogged cognitive arteries” when it comes to the sixties and American radicalism (1997, 64). But the inattention to the African American presence in the novel suggests a larger, more serious blockage in American literature. Reinforcing the importance of the unveiling of a black presence within canonical works and in the realm of American literary criticism, Toni Morrison argues that to ignore African Americans, and to fail to question the reasons for their presence, is to assume “the canon of American literature is ‘naturally’ or ‘inevitably’ white” ([1989] 1996, 25) and aims “to disenfranchise the writer, diminish the text and render the bulk of the literature aesthetically and historically incoherent—an exorbitant price for cultural (white male) purity” (26). To ignore the presence of African Americans in *American Pastoral* is to reproduce the very problems Morrison addresses. Overlooking the African American presence in the city, at the factory, and at the site of the 1967 Newark riots reduces the novel’s scope to the sixties and the conflict between Swede and Merry; and the novel’s rich historical references to Newark, from the postwar period to the 1967 Newark riots to the nineties, African Americans’ experience, and the contradictions within the Swede’s narrative concerning the history of African Americans are relatively neglected. As a result, African Americans become *subalterns* whose voices remain unheard.²⁰ The largely deracialized current readings of *American Pastoral* point to American *innocence* and a larger cultural blockage in America: the continuing marginality of African Americans in literature, mythology, history, and American society, a condition that keeps the resonances of the 1967 Newark riots alive in Ferguson, Baltimore, and elsewhere.

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Notes

1. See Philip Roth Papers, box 51, folder 2 (the abbreviation RP will be used for this source in the rest of the article).
2. Goldblatt analyzes the shifts in *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (1959), *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), *American Pastoral*, and *I Married a Communist* (1998).
3. The term *American Dream* was coined by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* (1931), but the concept traces back to the early settlers and the Declaration of Independence, which asserts Americans' rights to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." For the history of various expressions of the American Dream(s) and its persistence, see Cullen 2003. For how the Dream has mutated from the early twentieth century to the present, see Samuel 2012.
4. See Roediger 2005 on the eastern and southern European immigrants' struggle to be recognized, labeled, and accepted as white, which points to white privilege established in the social and racial structure. Also see Lipsitz 1998 for the structured advantages and cash value of whiteness that lead to rewards and unfair gains. On counterrealities that belie the Dream and the exclusion of African Americans, see Hochschild 1995.
5. Regarding the exclusion of women from GI benefits, see Brodtkin 1998, 42.
6. For details about FHA and HOLC discrimination practices, and redlining in particular, see Jackson 1985, 190–218 and Roediger 2005, 224–34. Such discrimination also occurred in the private sector. For example, huge developments such as Levittown explicitly forbade home sales to potential black buyers (see Brodtkin 1998, 44–50 and Jackson 234–43).
7. See Jackson 1985, 219–30. Also see Lipsitz 1998, 6–12, on the prolonged effects of urban renewal on minority neighborhoods.
8. See Abrams (1955) 1971 on housing segregation during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. This segregation persists. See Tobin 1987 on housing segregation in the 1980s. Also see Lipsitz 2011, in regard to how the lives of blacks and whites

are structured and consistently shaped along racial lines, allocating people into different spaces, positions, and social status, and dichotomizing the white and the black “spatial imaginary.”

9. Even the novel’s description of beaches suggests its emphasis on geographical division by race and class: Bradley Beach was for “the Jews without much money,” Avon was for “the Irish without much money,” Spring Lake was for the rich Irish, and Belmar was for “a mixture of everybody” (*AP* 196).

10. See Roediger 2005, 133–244 on how moving from ethnic communities to a suburb and a white neighborhood allowed European immigrants, whose identity and race were positioned as neither white nor black, to achieve full recognition as white.

11. Roth researched Morris County, a New Jersey suburb, and studied extensively the history of Jewish migration to this county (see *RP* 51.3–4, 6), but he minimized this aspect in the text. The Swede moves to and lives in a suburb as a (white) American.

12. Zuckerman admires the Swede and evokes postwar optimism, energy, and endless opportunity as he writes his long, undelivered speech for the forty-fifth high school reunion. Yet Roth underscores the irony of the Swede’s and his father’s nostalgic memory of Newark through Zuckerman, whose imagined story of the Swede’s life depicts a postwar period whose optimism clashes with a counterreality. This clash also appears in Roth’s *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), where Alvin Pepler challenges Zuckerman’s nostalgic memories of Newark and his abandonment of the city.

13. See Wright 1968; Mumford 2007, 98–122; and Tuttle 2009, 142–70. Wright’s book title, “Ready to Riot,” Mumford’s chapter title, “Brutal Realities and the Roots of the Disorders,” and Tuttle’s chapter title, “Bound to Explode: Generations of Frustration Boil Over in the Summer of 1967,” all indicate the inevitability of the riots.

14. For more on law enforcement officers’ racism and violence against African American residents, see Mumford 2007, 125–48.

15. Roth sent this unidentified clipping to his editor in order to correct the dates of “the two worst, most terrifying days” of the 1967 Newark riots (*AP* 162) to July 14 and 15 on the galley proofs. On the clipping, he marked a paragraph describing vandalism committed by the police against nonwhite owners’ shops that displayed signs saying “Brothers” or “Souls.”

16. There is a soured relation between American Jews and African Americans, and racism on both sides. For a history of this relationship, and during the sixties and within the civil rights movement of the period in particular, see Salzman and West 1997, especially 107–229.

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17. For the origin of the term, *model minority*, see Petersen 1966.

18. The riots in Newark, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Washington, DC, had their own specific and direct causes, but each shared common social contexts: chronic racism, police brutality, and African Americans' aggravated socioeconomic distress in urban areas. See Bullock 1969 regarding the 1965 LA riots and Thompson 2001 on the 1967 Detroit riots.

19. The drafts of the novel suggest that the underrepresentation of African American voices is intentional. At the end of the first 1995 draft of *American Pastoral*, there is a folder that includes Saul Schwarz's letter to Ed Brody written in August 1995. Commenting on Brody's description of the riots and black Newarkers, Schwarz wrote that they were not destroyers of the Jewish community in Weequahic. He instead emphasized that the 1967 riots and Newark's downfall basically resulted from the movement of Jews and other ethnic groups and individuals to the suburbs, which ruinously affected the urban environment and the African American migrants. He sent a copy of this letter to Roth (see RP 39.8). In his second draft of 1995, Roth inserted the actual riot scene, prioritizing Vicky's black point of view. But Roth later developed the scene by augmenting the Swede's negative description of the riots and rioters, as we read in the final, published version of the novel.

20. My reading of *American Pastoral* parallels Benita Parry's reading of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Rhys's novel has brought attention to the question of the audibility of the voice of the subaltern and has resulted in two main approaches. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the local black Creole perspective in Rhys's novel, including that of the black obeah woman, Christophine, is inaudible because it is mediated and narrated by a white Creole protagonist, Antoinette Cosway: it "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (1985, 253). In contrast, Parry claims that Spivak evinces a "deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard" (1987, 39) and rereads the novel by focusing on Christophine, reconstructing "the native as historical subject and agent of an oppositional discourse" (45). For both Spivak and Parry, however, the critical presence of black Creoles is embedded in the white Creole's victim narrative, illuminating the complex social and racial structures of the nineteenth-century West Indies. Likewise, recognizing and including African American perspectives in the discussion of *American Pastoral*, my reading attempts to examine the complex social and racial structure of American society that the novel represents through a "post-Jewish man" who has just become a nonhyphenated, white American.

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Elizabeth Bishop and the Mechanics of Poetic Pretence

Kathryn Van Wert

On the rare occasions when Elizabeth Bishop felt compelled to defend poetry, she did so in terms of its social life. That it had a life—went out into a community and did things to people—was the conviction behind most of what she said about poetry, a conviction she tested repeatedly in her poems. Playing off of remarks she made to a student about the poet's duty to represent "what really happened" (quoted in Wehr 1981, 324), and her warning to Robert Lowell about the pain that writing partial truths can cause,¹ critics have noted an apparent tension between Bishop's commitment to "things" or "reality" and her relationship to artistic invention.² In fact, Bishop's early writing suggests that from the beginning of her career she understood the imbrication of reality and artifice to be more complicated than her comments about literality might imply. In a rarely noted early review essay entitled "Mechanics of Pretence: Remarks on W. H. Auden" (1937), Bishop describes poetic influence in terms of "pretence." As her essay makes clear, she believed that "imaginary language" determines our relationships to the world's real "things":

Much can be done by means of pretence. Children pretend to speak a foreign language or inscribe its imitation alphabet in their school books, and inspired by the same motives, grow up to be linguists, grammarians, and travelers. Lord Byron, looking in the mirror, pretended to be the Byronic man, and the Byronic man, with his curls and collars, came into existence by the hundred. The growth of the small nation into the empire contains infinities of such pretence, gradually turning to the infinite realities of empire.

By “pretending” the existence of a language appropriate and comparable to the “things” it must deal with, the language is forced into being. It is learned by one person, by a few, by all who can become interested in that poet’s poetry. But as this imaginary language is elaborated and is understood by more people, it begins to work two ways at once. “Things” gave rise to the language; now the language arouses an independent life in the “things,” first dimly perceived in them only by the poet. To the initiate, the world actually manages to look like so-and-so’s poems—the poems that he first carefully fitted to the “ways of the world” himself. The play becomes a play on a stage dissolving to leave the ground underneath. The tendency, described by William Empson, of what a poet writes to become real; the tendency toward “prophecy”; obscurity, and “influence,” are all [departments] of this original act of pretence. (2006, 183–84)

Bishop was wary of prophecy, alternately anxious and insouciant about her influence, and her use of scare quotes suggests that she was not sure where the realm of “things” ended. But she puts her emphasis on the word *real* to stress the power of poetic language to create and alter what it describes. What and how the poet describes, and how closely or willingly we read, ultimately determines our perceptions of “the independent life in the ‘things’” and “ways of the world”—the perceptions on which we base our interactions with those things and with each other. This power makes the exchange between a poet and her reader a political one, a fact that Bishop underscores by translating the interpersonal relationship into a vision of transnational relations, where “the growth of the small nation into the empire contains infinities of such pretence, gradually turning to the infinite realities of empire.”

In this essay, which Bishop drafted shortly after graduating from college,³ she begins to articulate a theory of poetry’s material force and sociopolitical function that she would develop throughout her career. The claim that language reproduces the world it describes evokes William Wordsworth’s “mighty world / Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create, / And what perceive” (1965, 108).⁴ Notwithstanding Bishop’s sometimes romantic sensibility, however, her identification of artifice as a wellspring of experience is unromantic in its insistence that poetry’s power is ultimately mechanical, not magical. Mechanistic terms such

as “forced” and “fitted” echo in Bishop’s claim, made later in another unfinished essay, that “writing poetry is an unnatural act” (2006, 207).⁵ In describing the arbitrary, accumulative process through which “the world actually manages to look like so-and-so’s poems,” Bishop describes “the world”—a social, material actuality—as both the cause and the product of artistic representation.⁶ Far from pitting “pretence” against the real or genuine, she relates those terms dialectically. By emphasizing the lag between pretence and “infinite realities,” a space in which epistemology gives way to ontology, Bishop stops short of linguistic determinism. Yet in linking individual acts of pretence to the eventual hegemony of empire, she warns that the creative power of imaginative language is not categorically distinct from its power to do violence.

Compared with the nuanced treatment of language’s relationship to empire achieved in Bishop’s poems, “Mechanics of Pretence” is a relatively basic articulation of poetry’s sociopolitical stakes. She developed the essay’s insights over the next four decades, returning in her poems to the moments when we are poised between the power of description to deliver us into rich experience, and its power to keep us distant from the world’s “things.” While Bishop’s work rarely advertises its historicity overtly, she frequently invokes Western military and imperial history as a framework for investigating the ostensibly private calls that literary language makes on us. Her poems repeatedly dramatize the dynamic of call and response outlined in “Mechanics of Pretence,” where language and experience call each other into being dialectically. She accomplishes this through figures of layered address, in which the seductions of imperialist discourse or the pleas of a colonized subject allegorize and illuminate the appeals of “imaginary language,” and our capacity (or incapacity) for response.

Despite Bishop’s interest in the inherently social power of language—its ability to “arous[e] an independent life in . . . things” (2006, 183)—she was once regularly portrayed as politically disengaged, invested in aesthetic insularity, and a literary “tourist.”⁷ This tendency was answered by critical attempts to recover the submerged political content in her poems, a turn often marked by Adrienne Rich’s 1983 review of *The Complete Poems* and Lee Edelman’s 1985 essay, “The Geography of Gender: Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘In the Waiting Room.’” In the thirty years since Rich’s review, which argued that Bishop’s “poems embodied a need to . . . come to terms with a personal past, with family and class and race, with her presence as a poet in cities and landscapes where human suffering is not a metaphor” (1983,

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16), critics have offered political readings of every facet of Bishop's life and work. Not only has feminist criticism explored the territory opened up by Rich and Edelman, some have responded to the tradition of reading Bishop as a poet of "reticence" by arguing that her work challenges the very bodily or sexual ideals cherished by the early critics of that reticence, including Rich.⁸ Bishop's relationship to national politics at home and abroad has also been studied; Susan Schweik's 1991 study of World War II-era poetry was one of the first to highlight Bishop's engagement with militaristic culture, arguing that her work conscientiously resists "poetry's promotional and disciplinary functions in modern Western war systems" (1991, 236)—a project to which Camille Roman returns in her 2001 study of Bishop's Cold War-era politics.⁹ More recently, Bethany Hicok has examined Bishop's "increasingly involved dialogue with Brazilian politics" (2012, 133) in poems such as "Suicide of a Moderate Dictator," Bishop's most topically political poem.

Finding, however, that much of the work begun by cultural critics in the early 1980s "reinstate[s] rather than challenge[s] traditional distinctions between poetry and politics, private and public," Betsy Erkkila locates Bishop's politics in the formal characteristics of her "reticence" (1996, 285), which Erkkila reframes as skepticism: "Although Bishop never wrote the topical poetry we associate with the social-consciousness writing of the '30s, her work registers the 'revolutionary' effects of the time as a crisis of the subject, of knowledge, of signification, and of the possibility of meaning itself" (287).¹⁰ Similarly, Gillian White argues that Bishop "engage[s] a poetic politics, as did Language writers," through her poetry's resistance to traditional lyric-reading conventions (2014, 96). Whereas White explores the antiexpressive, metadiscursive dimensions of Bishop's work, Zachariah Pickard (2009) locates Bishop's politics in her distinctive use of "descriptive" language, revaluing a term that, like "reticence," has sometimes been used to depoliticize the poet.¹¹

Despite these and other contributions to what Kim Fortuny calls an "afterlife for formalist analysis of Bishop's poetry and prose" (2003, 4), critics remain vexed by the difficulty of accounting for her political commitments. In Pickard's view, "Much recent criticism reads Bishop in terms more politically specific than her poetics and, indeed, her politics allow. Not surprisingly, such discussion can leave her looking rather feeble and half-committed" (2009, 99). By focusing on descriptive language, Pickard aims to "shift the discussion into a realm in which Bishop fits

much more comfortably and in which her poetry can be read as a far more significant accomplishment." I share with Pickard and others an interest in the political implications of Bishop's poetics, particularly her deconstruction of expressive "voice" through metadiscursive and descriptive practices. Yet the note of apology in Pickard's remarks suggests that Bishop's readers are still haunted by an opposition between aesthetics and politics that tends to dissolve in her writing.

"Mechanics of Pretence" offers us a new framework for understanding the complex imbrication of aesthetic and political processes in Bishop's work, particularly the poems that address militarism and imperialism. While it may be true that "aesthetics are [Bishop's] avenue to the socio-political world" (Pickard 2009, 99), the reverse is equally true: Bishop's poems use politically charged scenes to explore the powers and limits of artistic representation. These poems reveal the conflicted nature of poetic vocation through their frequent layering of natural, descriptive, and historical discourses that summon the reader to divergent forms of participation. They also draw on World War II and colonial history as frameworks for investigating the multiple resonances of the term "vocation," including the sociopolitical dimensions of a poet's "calling" and the construction of a voice from textual fabric. Bishop repeatedly invokes the war and popular front militarism to explore the mechanics of poetic pretence, and the different kinds of responsiveness it nurtures or forestalls.

On the eve of World War II, Bishop bought a house in Key West, Florida, near a major naval base used for training personnel and operating fleet aircraft squadrons. In 1940, the town's population was 12,927; by 1945, some 15,000 military and 3,400 civilian personnel had been stationed in Key West (US 1942, 212). In a letter written June 8, 1940 to Marianne Moore, Bishop describes the view from her writing studio of a landscape animated by tropical weather and military activity:

It is the "rainy season" and we have had the most magnificent thunderstorms almost every day. I have taken a little room in our favorite hotel here to work in the mornings. . . . On the third floor (very high for Key West) is a little balcony with a flagpole, and two benches where one can sit and watch the palm trees wave all over town and see the ocean on three sides. It is so pretty—but more and more Navy ships keep coming, and

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they are building a tremendous airplane hangar. I am very much afraid that this is the last season we'll be able to live here for a long time. (1994, 91)

From her balcony, the thunderstorms and military construction both seem to embody the rainy season's greater chaos. On December 29, 1941, three weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack, Bishop wrote to Moore with greater urgency, emphasizing the crowdedness of her surroundings:

I am rather depressed about Key West—and my house—just now. The town is terribly overcrowded and noisy (at least on White Street) and not a bit like itself. It is one of those things one can't resent, of course, because it's all necessary, but I really feel that this is no place to be unless one is of some use. They are talking of evacuating the civilians. I don't believe they will, but still, what I want to do is to rent the house again and go somewhere. I haven't given up the idea of South America. I'm not a bit sure of the ethics of it all—what do you think? (105)

Bishop's clear anxiety about the militarization of Key West and her longing to escape don't overshadow her ambivalence about the war itself. After asserting that "it's all necessary" and that one should join the cause or get out, she appeals to Moore for some discussion of the ethics of (non)participation—by implication, both her own and that of the United States. Camille Roman notes that on June 10, 1940, two days after Bishop's letter to Moore about the arrival of warships in Key West, Franklin Roosevelt had delivered a speech that "effectively ended American neutrality in the war," committing the United States to the fight against fascism and taking pains to distinguish the current imperative from the debased narratives that had promoted US involvement in World War I (2001, 34). Roman records a pointed shift in cultural politics away from noninvolvement, citing the popularity of Edna St. Vincent Millay's patriotic poetry and the publication in 1940 of Archibald MacLeish's "The Irresponsibles," which criticized writers "for having devalued the words and conceptions and slogans needed for high morale in war" (quoted in Roman, 35).¹²

Bishop's equivocation with Moore is probably a matter of epistolary decorum; the letter certainly does not attempt a thorough reflection of her political views. Her deferral of comprehensive analysis and her

deference to Moore are characteristic of the “reticence” her friends and critics often saw in her. In the years since her death, this perceived caginess has led scholars to extrapolate a politics from her personal correspondence and journals, but apart from enriching a mythologized image of the poet with provocative biographical detail, such scholarship has often done little to illuminate her work. Bishop’s poetry from the thirties and forties is a more intricate record of what the war meant to her than any of her letters. “Little Exercise,” published in 1946 in the *New Yorker*, is a case in point. This poem revisits the landscape Bishop described to Moore in 1940, mixing elements of “magnificent thunderstorm” and war. It juxtaposes the noise of military bombardment and the state’s call to arms with the pelting of a storm and the incantatory “exercise” of poetry. As a result, the problem of military participation reveals underlying questions about the construction of a poetic voice and the reader’s receptiveness to evocative language:

Think how they must look now, the mangrove keys
lying out there unresponsive to the lightning
in dark, coarse-fibered families,

where occasionally a heron may undo his head,
shake up his feathers, make an uncertain comment
when the surrounding water shines.

[. . .]

Think of someone sleeping in the bottom of a row-boat
tied to a mangrove root or the pile of a bridge;
think of him as uninjured, barely disturbed. (1983, 41)

This poem is a “little exercise” in various senses. For the poet, it is an exercise in yoking referent and unlike reference; a series of languid, imperturbable life forms are described in language so precisely evocative that the poem works against our initial recognition that every part of the landscape is in some way invulnerable to the storm. The “mangrove keys”—already a richly allusive two-word poem—lie unmoved by lightning. Not so the reader, for whom the phrase “dark, coarse-fibered families” has a telescopic effect, drawing her near with a shock of texture. Though this vista’s palm fronds are “limp fish-skeletons” (41), the

storm-light delivers them to us in flashes of sudden revelation. Formally and thematically, the poem pulls in opposite directions. Its anaphoric instruction ("Think of . . ."), mobile lens, and bright precision have a bracing effect on the reader. By contrast, the landscape of which we are induced to "think" remains half asleep.¹³

A quoted stage direction from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* instructs us to contemplate the storm as Henry contemplates a battle from neutral ground, in "another part of the field."¹⁴ In the play, from the king's perch on a hillside, the war strikes him as arbitrary and equally weighted on both sides, and before long his reverie shifts to the advantages of a shepherd's life, whose hours are divided (like the heron's) among eating, playing, and resting. The introduction of a martial context in this stanza of "Little Exercise" encourages us to read the poem's title as a veiled reference to the military exercises Bishop witnessed in Key West. But what reader would not, in 1946, have seen the analogy to war even without Shakespeare? Likewise, the poem's description of the storm as a "series / of small, badly lit battle scenes" (41) seems excessive to the goal of allegory, suggesting that we read it less as a hint than a deliberate warning: to convert this vibrant scene into an extended metaphor for war would be to take the simplest available lesson from the exercise. The obtrusiveness of the allusion, made more so by quotation marks, is puzzling: if this is not crucially a poem about war, why has the allegory been set up so neatly? Yet if it is a WWII-era protest poem, an exercise in imagining restraint amid warlike extremity, why are we led through it with a storm rather than a more mimetic version of the military exercises that Bishop witnessed at close range? How, in other words, is this text enriched by military allusion?

As many writers of the previous generation had done with the Great War, Bishop evokes World War II to suggest that the exercise of choice in description—that is, the writer's choice of language and the reader's collaborative concentration—engages our political intelligence as thoroughly as a military exercise. Our response to this language is juxtaposed with the drowsiness of the land and its inhabitants so that however vividly we "see" it, we must feel our own distance from the scene, and thus the power of description. As an exploration of the political nature of human concentration, "Little Exercise" suggests that aesthetic and sociopolitical commitments are inextricable. Harold Schweizer compares the role of concentration in Bishop's work to Theodor Adorno's

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assertion, made decades later, that “no gaze attains beauty that is not accompanied by indifference, indeed, almost by contempt, for all that lies outside the object contemplated” (quoted in Schweizer 2005, 49). While Bishop was far from indifferent to what lay beyond her poetry’s “gaze,” she was especially interested in poetry that could elicit that kind of profoundly unbalanced focus, a concentration so intense that it suspends selfhood. “What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it,” writes Bishop in her well-known “Darwin letter” to Anne Stevenson, “is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration” (quoted in Schwartz and Estess 1983, 288). Such concentration is useless only in the sense that it resists the “moral terrorism” that Adorno and Bishop each associated with politically motivated art (Schweizer 2005, 49). It is a concentration that renders the self useless, a way of looking with strange eyes at something that cannot confirm us to ourselves. Against the insinuation of military response, this selfless concentration seems less an alternative to politics than an alternative to the preconstituted political subject, to whom the state makes its appeal in a time of war. “Little Exercise” has us contemplate not just a landscape but selfhood called into being by poetry, a subject made and unmade in the act of reading.

What we “make” with our concentration in “Little Exercise” is a paradox: an unconscious human figure who is nevertheless not of a type with his nonhuman setting. The final image of someone asleep in a mangrove harbor and the value-loaded term “uninjured” cast, by contrast, an apolitical, inhuman neutrality over the mangroves, skeletons, and weeds that have successively drawn us to the interior of this mindscape. The sleeper is not uninjured in quite the way that the land is; he is “uninjured” rather than safe, “barely disturbed” rather than intact. Though he joins the world of things that have survived the storm, he is not permitted to shed the human charge of his being, which has been reinforced by the allusion to a history play about the inevitability of war. Still, the beauty of his image depends on our sense that he has drifted halfway across some boundary in his sleep, from one type of neutrality we understand to another we do not quite—from Henry’s to the heron’s. Anything we come to know about this scene is produced as well as limited by its description. We can see, for example, that the relative safety of coastal life is somehow an inner feature of the storm’s process, but this does not resolve what is inscrutable in the sleeper’s image. Its odd, exhilarating

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effect is to make us feel our own partial exclusion even from what we imagine: a strange container (or little boat) whose contents are partially unfathomable. When it was first published in the *New Yorker*, the poem was titled "Little Exercise at 4 A.M.," a detail that further separates the reader from the man in the boat. In the wee hours of the morning, we are awake to the details of this scene, and the man in the boat is not; such is the mysterious power of language to represent difference without collapsing it. We are not expected to be neutral about that difference; it is precisely what compels us to commit our imaginations to this exercise.

The poem's analogical evocation of wartime neutrality supports its gesture toward a politics of description. If we are told to imagine the fading storm as something like a series of badly lit battle scenes growing farther from us, it is not to suggest that war can be imagined away (as Henry tries to do), nor that the consequences of pacifism can be exhaustively imagined. Nevertheless, the poem demonstrates that language may call forth various kinds of participation, just as language allows us to explore alternatives to participating in cultures of violence. Such an alternative might start with an image, no more than the image of a container whose interior we have yet to inscribe.

I suspect that critics rarely treat "Little Exercise" except in passing because Bishop's oeuvre includes poems that deal in more overt and extended ways with war and militarism on the one hand, and with representation and the natural world on the other.¹⁵ Like many of the poems in *North & South* (1946), Bishop's first collection, "Little Exercise" seems by its conspicuous yet insubstantial military reference to foster expectations it does not intend to fulfill. In 1945, Bishop wrote to her editor apologizing for her lack of poems dealing explicitly with World War II: "The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war, at a time when so much war poetry is being published, will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach. The chief reason is simply that I work very slowly" (1994, 125).¹⁶ In fact, the collection contains a number of direct references to war (to name a few: "army" and "war" in two of the "Songs for a Colored Singer" series (1983, 47–51); "armored cars" and "ugly tanks" in "Sleeping Standing Up" (30); "ammunition" and "carrier-warrior-pigeon" in "Paris, 7 A.M." (26–27); and the central battle metaphor of "Wading at Wellfleet" (7). None of these references is obscure, but neither are they extensive or complex—suggesting that Bishop neither wanted the war to be far from her readers' minds, nor did she want them to spend their time looking for it.

Her critics, however, have often treated the war as a tacit subtext in need of discovery. Schweik argues that “Bishop’s first book might be read, in fact, as a war book in-directed. In it the matters of war literature—naval engagements, border crossings, skirmishes, search missions, even a monument of sorts—appear, but only as covert operations” (1991, 213). In fact, the “operations” she lists are not particularly covert; most even give the poems their shape. For example, “Sleeping Standing Up” contains both a search mission and a border crossing of sorts, where dreams are the “armored cars” that carry the sleeper through a day’s submerged imagery:

The armored cars of dreams, contrived to let us do
so many a dangerous thing,
are chugging at its edge
all camouflaged, and ready to go through
the swiftest streams, or up a ledge
of crumbling shale, while plates and trappings ring (1983, 30)

The military contraption of this poem provides a figure for illiteracy; those armored cars are part of a symbolic order we erect in our dreams that ultimately cripples understanding. The dream-terrain’s ledges crumble beneath the weight of our enterprise, and we hear the clatter of our own machine instead of whatever lies beyond it, in the “forest of thick-set trees.” Dreams, like tanks, are dangerous contrivances that let us behave in a mutable, fleeting world as though it were not so. Here, as in “Little Exercise,” military apparatus lends a worldly urgency to the question of what we stand to lose, or gain, by intoxication with images of our own or a poet’s making.

According to Steven Axelrod, “It is finally time to acknowledge that Bishop was being disingenuous” in her letter to her editor since, “although her poem ‘Roosters’ does deal indirectly with the war while other poems critique militarism or war in general, Bishop never actually wrote the promised poems that would ‘deal directly’ with World War II” (2003, 844). This is true, and beside a poem like “Roosters,” “Little Exercise” does not even seem to treat the war indirectly. But as I have suggested, the matter of focus—that is, the range and intensity of concentration that descriptive language provokes—is precisely what Bishop explores in that poem. What the exercise finally puts under investigation are the conditions necessary for language to produce understanding of any kind, direct or indirect. If *North & South* is not concerned with World War II as such, its portraits

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of receptivity, that mercurial interplay of alertness and alienation, acquire a special urgency from their evocation of a historical moment when all citizens were being “called” by national patriotic discourse to war.

Indeed, as John Lowney argues, Bishop wrote much of *North & South* at a time when the summons to war was effected in terms that were inimical to art (2006, 90–91). In 1939, the *Partisan Review* published Philip Rahv’s “Twilight of the Thirties,” an indictment of Popular Front politics in which he blames the “withering away of literature” and intellectual freedom on the cultural production of a “new nationalism, this bombast about the ‘American way of life,’ this so-called ‘rediscovery of our democratic past’” (1939, 10). Lowney argues that while the totalitarian state was the ostensible threat to intellectual freedom in the thirties and forties, “the threat to literary expression was practically as dire in the democratic nations that were more intent on preparing for war than in protecting the values for which they would presumably be fighting” (2006, 90). As writers like Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot demonstrated in their Great War-era writing, the well-theorized threat of bourgeois nationalism can productively raise more amorphous questions about our susceptibility to all types of discourse. Through its layering of summons—the state’s call to arms, the storm’s call to awaken, and the poem’s call to imagine—Bishop’s “little exercise” elaborates the politically consequential space between the linguistically potent pretense of Lord Byron, who, “looking in the mirror, pretended to be the Byronic man,” and the acts of pretense by which nations arrogate resources and produce the “infinite realities of empire” (Bishop 2006, 183).

Like “Little Exercise,” Bishop’s most emblematic war poem is above all a meditation on responsiveness. First published in the *New Republic* in April 1941, “Roosters” uses the pugnacious, militant birds of its title to dramatize “the uncontrolled, traditional cries” (1983, 37)—and sinister appeal—of both institutionalized violence and the salvation narratives that underwrite such violence. Bishop’s roosters strut like officers “in green-gold medals dressed, / planned to command and terrorize the rest,” while their “rustling wives,” who “lead hens’ lives / of being courted and despised,” nevertheless cannot help admiring the roosters’ “vulgar beauty of iridescence.” Nor, as the poem shifts to include “us” among the hens, are we as imperturbable as the man who sleeps through the storm in “Little Exercise”; when the roosters cry “Get up! Stop dreaming!” we do, protesting.¹⁷ But the rooster is more than a voice of militarist provocation;

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he is, above all, a symbol of the constructed nature of all voices and all symbols. Taking the long view of history, the poem's speaker observes that

there would always be
a bronze cock on a porphyry
pillar so the people and the Pope might see

that even the Prince
of the Apostles long since
had been forgiven, and to convince

all the assembly
that "Deny deny deny"
is not all the roosters cry. (38)

Through this displacement in perspective, Bishop establishes a parallel between the military and biblical contexts in which the rooster has become an icon. In the former, his warlike crowing produces "a senseless order [that] floats / all over town" (36). His posturing and pretence, his "raging heroism defying / even the sensation of dying" (37), are seductive because they appeal to our desire for order and identity. An element of fatalism helps ensure that his message "with horrible insistence, // . . . flares, and all over town begins to catch" (35). The same fatalism leads "the people and the Pope" to discover in the cock's crowing a sealed fate for Peter, who, "heart-sick, / still cannot guess" (38) that he will be forgiven, and the symbol of his sin rendered a symbol of redemption. Here again, the enervating provocation of warlike discourse problematizes our availability to intoxicating language of all types. "Roosters" parodies not only phallic power, as readers have long understood, but also the ease with which we make the rooster's cry a symbol of apocalyptic order. As Bishop implies in her review of Auden, beneath the threats of European fascism or American militarism there often lurks the danger of a rigid, unregenerate use of symbols.

Thus, even a poem as self-consciously engaged with militarism as "Roosters" suffers from readings that set out to discover a "moral" about World War II or war in general, as when Roman concludes that "most importantly . . . Bishop points out that the war enters the mind, the imagination, dreaming, lovemaking, and the other most intimate parts of human living by drawing the scene of the roosters and crucifixion into

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the bedroom of the speaker" (2001, 69). This reading skirts the poem as a whole, which dramatizes the incursion of martial and Christian activity into the private sphere only to subject it to the homely purification of morning, demonstrating the contingency of all narrative and the difficulty, given the cabbages of the homestead, of remaining committed to the night's fatalistic response. Early in the poem, the roosters' warlike cry originates in our own backyard, "grat[ing] like a wet match / from the broccoli patch" (1983, 35) before flaring and spreading like fire. But that same broccoli—with its sheer, unpretentious givenness—comes finally to symbolize the power of perspective, of seeing things literally in a different light:

In the morning
a low light is floating
in the backyard, and gilding

from underneath
the broccoli, leaf by leaf;
how could the night have come to grief? (39)

As the poem ends, a low light rather than a senseless order "floats" over the world and conditions our responses to it. By this light, it is possible to say of the rooster that "what he sung / no matter" (37). Not just because he is dead but because even his symbolic value, which once seemed unalterable, has changed. Published during a war whose horrors would rival if not eclipse those of the Great War, "Roosters" depicts a world where shifting perspective reveals even the most violent or adamant stance to be fungible.

If there is a lesson here about war, it is more crucially a lesson about language and the mechanics of pretence that Bishop outlines in her review of Auden. A close examination of those mechanics in her work is ultimately indistinguishable from a more nuanced historicism—one that considers the precise ways in which historical violence frames, illuminates, and sometimes ironizes linguistic processes. Reading Bishop in this way suggests that the histories of war, imperialism, and even gender are less central to the poetry than they might seem. Yet at the same time, the specters of that violence are all the more instrumental for the ways in which they materialize the poetry's concerns with language and interiority—that is, with language's power to summon forth inchoate

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life. Poems like “Little Exercise” and “Roosters” invert the ordinary structure of elegy, where military violence can be “processed” as poetic form; instead, war becomes a trope through which these poems investigate the dynamics of linguistically inscribed selfhood, the relationship of imagination to public culture, and the role of “pretence” in the circulation of cultural capital. Bishop’s reader is led through imaginative exercises that raise the question of whether poetic and militaristic discourses are analogous modes of address. As a whole, her poetry elaborates the consequential differences between these uses of voice, as war becomes a provisional—and ultimately inapposite—metaphor for poetry.

In the decades following World War II, a period of nationalist struggle and the progressive decolonization of the southern regions of the globe, Bishop evokes colonialism and its lingering effects much as she uses the war in her first volume: as a metaphor for the potential powers—both oppressive and liberating—of poetic language. Perhaps more than any other poem, “Brazil, January 1, 1502” (1959) has been used to demonstrate the critical relationship between “questions of travel”—as she titled one of her volumes—and questions of language in her work.¹⁸ To the tradition of reading the poet as an analog for the imperialist explorer, I would add that the latter’s problematic energies are not simply shifted onto the poet, but that this poem functions as another descriptive “exercise” whereby our response to poetic language not only conditions political response but might also provide the grounds for its interruption or transformation.

The poem overlays the construction of two voices: the voices of indigenous women who are, like the man asleep in a boat, partially obscured at the poem’s interior—and the voice of the poet, which, in its capacity to respond, also stands for the reader’s. As in “Little Exercise,” our receptivity is at issue: what sort of call will our habits of language permit us to hear and, in turn, to make? In the first stanza, a spectacularly ineloquent narrator describes the Brazilian landscape in terms that thwart imagination and call almost nothing into being:

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
 exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
 every square inch filling in with foliage—
 big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves,
 blue, blue-green, and olive,
 [. . .]

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and flowers too, like giant water lilies
up in the air—up, rather, in the leaves—
purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,
rust red and greenish white;
solid but airy; fresh as if just finished
and taken off the frame. (1983, 91)

This tone is a far cry from the “Wordsworthian readiness” that David Kalstone attributes to Bishop’s landscape poems of the preceding decade (1989, 67). Aside from the traditional gendering of nature, there seems to be very little about the speaker’s vision that is involuntary or illuminating; we are greeted instead by a fussy accumulation of abstract modifiers that refer only to each other and prevent us from seeing much of anything. The leaves are “big,” “little,” “giant,” and even “monster,” but without a scale or key we have no way of translating those terms into values. This stanza might be a scrap torn from some map, exact and illegible. Bent on a precision that makes no allowance for metaphor, or what T. S. Eliot called “suggestiveness” (2005, 162–63), the speaker revises compulsively—“up in the air” becomes “up, rather, in the leaves,” and “yellow” becomes “two yellows.” As she implies, this scene is too “finished,” a closed system of reference that is paradoxically too open—precisely the opposite of “Little Exercise.” Without a frame, we cannot tell what is excluded from the scene; we have no call to concentrate. With only “yellows” in our descriptive vocabulary, we have to feel the incapacity of our imagination to deck this landscape with the life we know it must have.

Bishop proposes in “Mechanics of Pretence” that when faced with such a disproportion of word and thing, we need a new poetry:

In the earlier stages the poet is the verbal actor. One of the causes of poetry must be, we suppose, the feeling that the contemporary language is not equivalent to the contemporary fact; there is something out of proportion between them, and what is being said in words is not at all what is being said in “things.” To connect this disproportion a pretence is at first necessary. By “pretending” the existence of a language appropriate and comparable to the “things” it must deal with, the language is forced into being. (2006, 183)

In the second stanza of “Brazil,” the speaker drops her pretence to sheer description and starts really pretending, in Bishop’s theoretical sense of

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the word. By introducing elements of narrative and allusion, she opens the scene to contamination by memory, preconception, and desire, limiting our focus in a way that is problematic but exciting. Now she notices “big symbolic birds” who, “perching there in profile, beaks agape, / . . . keep quiet” (1983, 91). And “in the foreground,” witnessed by the silent, gaping birds, “there is Sin: / five sooty dragons” engaged in a mating ritual. Even the rocks are now under assault,

threatened from underneath by moss
in lovely hell-green flames,
attacked from above
by scaling-ladder vines, oblique and neat,
“one leaf yes and one leaf no” (in Portuguese).

As though galvanized by the current of our prejudice, this scene takes on the dimensions of bas-relief, acquiring a foreground. The “symbolic” birds remain flat in profile, yet in their stillness they remind us of something from another time and place—of hieroglyphs maybe—thus gaining referential depth. The foliage has brightened from “blue, blue-green, and olive” to “hell-green,” its beauty saved from abstraction by a sense of encroaching damnation, and animated by subterranean pressure. “Sin” and “one leaf yes and one leaf no,” which might be a tropical version of “he loves me/loves me not,” call our attention to the elements of this scene that suggest erotic play—a feeling that peaks in the image of a female lizard surrounded by the “sooty” males, “her wicked tail straight up and over, / red as a red-hot wire” (92).

Between the first stanza’s “two yellows” and the second stanza’s “red-hot,” we have an impossible choice: the inertia of description uninflected by ideology, or the self-serving (yet self-loathing) moralism of Christian mythology, not to mention European gender convention. We will learn in the final stanza that the latter goads “the Christians, hard as nails” (92) to sexual violence, yet the poem’s darkest discovery is that for us, unlike the victims of that violence, there is no possibility of retreat:

Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L’Homme armé or some such tune,
they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
each out to catch an Indian for himself—
those maddening little women who kept calling,
calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
and retreating, always retreating, behind it.

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If we attempt a retreat to the flat world of the first stanza, the Indian women who keep calling to each other become entirely invisible, unimaginable in a language that so far has been only “fitted,” to borrow a term from “Mechanics,” to a landscape of inert pastels. Such language is perhaps without prejudice, but it is ill-equipped to represent any form of difference more complex or consequential than the distinction between “blue,” “blue-green,” and “olive.” Nor, on the other hand, does the introduction of mythology bring us closer to the human figures at the center of this poem. The third stanza’s parenthetical aside, “or had the birds waked up?,” recalls the hieroglyphic birds of the second stanza, warning that ideological frameworks give the world an illusory liveliness, turning a distant yet (maddeningly) human call into a scenery of barely audible birdsong. Ultimately, neither the flat, artless language of “pure” perception nor the artful imposition of a frame succeeds in delivering the world to us. One cannot respond to the frustration of the second stanza by reverting to some preideological, purified language, but neither can one settle for the narrative of “Sin.”

On its own, the poem’s last scene—a narrative of imperialist violence and the partial resistance of the colonial subject—should be familiar. But its function in the poem as a whole is less familiar: the depiction of a brutally exploited racial and sexual difference reveals an underlying gap between descriptive language and experience, a disproportion of the type Bishop describes in her review of Auden. While they chase the native women, the Christians hum a fifteenth-century folk song (often sung at mass) proclaiming the armed man’s menace; with those words they accompany their incursion, relating their violence to a tradition of male privilege that precedes them. In all its newness, Brazil is “not unfamiliar” (92), a sure sign that the language once “forced into being” for such an encounter now has a hand in forcing the encounter. The poem dramatizes the process by which “pretence”—first so necessary as a way of doing justice to the world—eventually produces the more dangerous “infinite realities of empire.” Bishop speaks of the process by which a discourse is naturalized as one where “the play becomes a play on a stage dissolving to leave the ground underneath”; here, the invisibility of the stage endangers the actors—who are unaware that they have forced the world to conform to their ideas of gender and property—as well as the (back)ground, to which the women are “always retreating.”¹⁹

In the terms of “Mechanics of Pretence,” “Brazil” illustrates two of poetry’s first causes: in the first stanza, a world of “things” that have yet to inspire a language sufficient for relating to them; and, in the third stanza, a world in which language is a hanging fabric that perpetually obscures vision. The second stanza seems most nearly like the unfolding moment in which poetic language is first “fitted to” the “ways of the world”; with its foliage of “hell-green flames,” it gives us an experience of the land that is both beautiful and, in retrospect, dangerously flawed. The poet who would do justice to this scene cannot do without artifice or “pretence,” whose social force makes it impossible to draw a hard line between poetic and social justice, given what Jeffrey Gray calls “the impossibility of finding that ‘different world’ unconstructed by and uninvolved with ourselves” (2005, 39).²⁰ When Kalstone reads this poem as a “rededication to what Brazil had confirmed in [Bishop’s] preferences for descriptive encounter over historical experience,” the work of “a lone individual entering into and acquiring attachments, tentatively” (1989, 194–95), he draws a distinction between poetic description and historicity that Bishop probably would not have recognized, however much she might have felt like a “lone” individual in the wider world. Thus, the poem’s most overt figure for political difference—the insurmountable, intolerable distance of the racial and sexual “other”—reveals a difference in language traditions. The poet identifies with “the Christians” to the extent that her deafness to the women’s voices is not merely convenient but a matter of linguistic and literary tradition. Unless a new language is “forced into being,” any rapprochement between her and these women must occur in the language she has inherited from the Portuguese explorers. As they pass her the terms in which nature greeted their eyes, they also bequeath her their range of vision, its depths, and their expectations for the world they saw. If the poet hopes to hear the women’s calls of distress more clearly—a fourth option for a yet-unwritten stanza—she will have to confront her problematic relationship to “poetic” calling. That is, we have to interrogate the language we force into being for incommensurable things, and the things that in turn call us to write.²¹

The trace of the indigenous women’s voices prevents us from reading this poem as a complacent acceptance of the “postmodern” condition. Certainly, it will support the various radical notions some readers now take for granted—that the ideological “frame” is the foundation of historical knowledge; that there is no fact anterior to representation. But

by representing what might seem like a higher-stakes loss than the first stanza's obscure vista or the second stanza's symbolically overburdened lizards, the women stop us from shelving these lessons about language without acknowledging their dark side. The women's calling makes us wonder whether the poem is not also a partly inaudible call of distress, and whether there is not a thin elegiac melody floating beneath its tough lucidity—an elegy not only for the disappearing women but for a poetic tradition more responsive to their reality. Readers have wanted to see in the women's "retreat" a meaningful form of agency or resistance to violence, but these readings indulge a problematic urge to equate form and content, too readily finding in the poem's attitude toward signification a means of escape for the women.²² If instead we encounter the story of colonial violence as a context for thinking about descriptive language, the poem becomes profoundly sad. It seems to dare us to imagine the native women as "uninjured," knowing well that in the terms we have, we cannot.

Many of the poems Bishop wrote in the thirties and early forties while living in Florida also draw on the history of colonialism in the Americas to explore the mechanics of pretence. In "Florida" (1939), Bishop foregrounds the discursive impossibility of objective, value-neutral description, implicitly connecting the linguistic persistence of privileged subjectivity to the marginalization of subaltern people. Lowney links Bishop's concern with subalternity to the fact that her residence in Key West coincided with a number of "New Deal documentary projects," publicly funded and highly publicized ethnographic initiatives to recover "buried" American cultures. Noting that many artists suspected these salvage projects of having "nationalist rather than primitivist" motives, Lowney argues that Bishop's "reflexive practice of surrealist observation and ironic representation calls into question the rhetorical act of salvage it practices. Rather than allegories of salvage, her fables of the margins could be more accurately described as allegories of allegories of salvage" (2006, 75), where "salvage" functions as a form of artistic "pretence." Similarly, Pickard argues that many of the poems in *North & South* "look like allegory but do not do the work that allegory generally does; they present fully realized alternate worlds that seem to have been constructed to allow a particular, significant narrative to play itself out, but they never quite indicate their purpose in doing so" (2009, 23). That is, without subordinating poetics to political ideology, these poems call our attention to moments in which description conditions experience.

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We might indeed read "Florida" as an allegory of an allegory—one that plays with ethnographic conventions to suggest that a poet's choices amount to "salvage," conceived not as salvation but as a form of unnatural selection that highlights the powers and dangers of poetic "pretence." Like "Brazil," "Florida" develops its politics of description through the trope of racial difference, conjuring the shadow of colonial violence and the "call" of an indigenous woman. And like "Little Exercise," it brings a landscape to life even as the poet's eye finds death and decay everywhere, from oysters that "strew white swamps with skeletons" and buzzards "drifting down, down, / over something they have spotted in the swamp" to "stumps and dead trees" on which "the charring is like black velvet." Obliquely, this poem invokes evolutionary theory, which in the degraded form of social Darwinism was having its heyday in the 1930s. This landscape is choked with the ostensible evidence of adaptation; there are "long S-shaped birds," mosquitoes whose "ferocious obligatos" suggest they are hardwired for their hunt, and Darwin's own obsession, the "enormous turtles, helpless and mild," who "die and leave their barnacled shells on the beaches, / and their large white skulls with round eye-sockets / twice the size of a man's." Nothing in this poem is still; every life form is observed in a process apparently linked to its survival: hunting, singing, glowing at night. The beach is also littered with the recently abandoned shells of aquatic life, "arranged as on a gray rag of rotted calico, / the buried Indian Princess's skirt" (1983, 32–33)—proof that unlike "the buried Indian Princess" whose skirt is present by analogy only, the turtles and mollusks are still, as a species, with us.

But for the speaker this activity is all ornamental, decoration for a "monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line." Just as "Brazil, January 1, 1502" interrogates the propriety of the correspondence we imagine between the "Indian women" and the lizards (whose correspondence with the Christian ur-lizard is also suspect), "Florida" questions the nature of correspondences between creaturely form and function—between an organism's color, shape, or habits and some feature of its environment. "The palm trees clatter in the stiff breeze / like the bills of pelicans" as though tree and bird have both adapted to a world of stiff breezes by miming stiffness, and "the tropical rain comes down / to freshen the tide-looped strings of fading shells" as though the principle of selection were visible in the favoring of these shells, saved at the last moment from death on dry land.

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But then the lusciously allusive names of shells, listed for our pleasure, raise our doubts about the human ability to identify genuine correspondence—names like “Job’s Tear, the Chinese Alphabet, the scarce Junonia, / parti-colored pectins and Ladies’ Ears.” Are the associations with mythology, human sign systems, and anatomy recorded by these names more or less dubious than the ones implied by evolutionary theory? How natural is our way of seeing, and what forms of life does it make possible? The evidence of the landscape seems to confirm what we know of our evolutionary moment: that the turtle is not yet extinct, while the indigenous princess—not just any native woman but a member of an old tribe—is long gone. Yet she too corresponds to certain features of the landscape; the speaker recognizes the coast by the color of her skirt and the shells that are reminiscent of its decorations. And, in one of Bishop’s characteristic and infinitely odd reversals, the alligator—living, present—speaks in her throat:

The alligator, who has five distinct calls:
 friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning—
 whimpers and speaks in the throat of the Indian Princess. (33)

It is not the “buried” Indian Princess who survives in the alligator’s “five distinct calls” but the alligator that survives in its resemblance to her, its ability to call forth our memory or fantasy of her. We seem to be able to distinguish the different tones of its voice in terms of what we know or think we know about her. So it is she whose persistence in language—what we can manage to remember, contain, muster, and see in the world—reminds us that description has recognizably political consequences.

Bishop lived in Key West until the war ended, and while for many critics this poem marks a transition toward her more loosely ordered landscape poems, it uses military reference in much the same way as “Little Exercise.” For a moment, the decay on the beach looks to the speaker like evidence of a wartime cannonade; the landscape is “dotted as if bombarded, with green hummocks / like ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass” (32). But almost before an image of destruction can materialize, the speaker reframes it as an event whose violence has passed both in time and comprehensibility (as it does when dawn breaks in “Roosters”); now the cannonballs serve as fertile ground. Here is a new theory of evolution: things do not survive because they are “fit” or adaptable; we

survive because our ability to describe the world evolves. Moreover, the poet's construction of a speaker depends on her reconstruction of the American Indian's voice. This evolution is a function of description: no matter how vivid their image, the grassy cannonballs are not actually present in this landscape; it is the dead skeletons that look like ancient cannonballs. The speaker has introduced an image of war to show us that no image's evidentiary value is fixed, not even the image of a force so destructive that it seems barely available to description. The comparison of a hummock to a cannonball disrupts the simple flow of likeness to ask what differences we elide by analogy—in this case, a possible difference in our attitudes toward theories of racial and national teleology. This might be its own powerful "little exercise," implying continuity in Bishop's thinking about the relation between poetic description and a certain kind of pacifism: "Imagine a cannon-ball. Imagine a cannon-ball covered / with moss."

If "Florida"'s portrait of a "careless, corrupt state" gestures toward racial politics through the buried woman and what the speaker describes ambiguously as "black specks too far apart, and ugly whites" (33), it is to make a point about language that has far-reaching social consequences: careless corruption may be the default "state" of nature, amid which all intensive selection—that of descriptive language most of all—is unnatural, hence powerful. Unlike the distribution of debris on the shore, the poem's foci cannot be random; even the most casual description of a landscape gives the writer a choice she cannot abrogate: between language that allows us to imagine the Indian's survival and language that finds in the order of things a justification or necessity.

"Florida" is therefore also a poem about the politics of remembrance or monumentality, akin to Bishop's most famous poem on that subject, "The Monument" (1940). The eponymous structure of that poem gives no hint of sufficiency or closure; it is an impromptu, communal thing constantly worked on by human and natural forces:

The monument's an object, yet those decorations,
carelessly nailed, looking nothing like nothing at all,
give it away as having life, and wishing;
wanting to be a monument, to cherish something. (24)

Existing somewhere between impulse and object, the monument is and is not independent of its maker. It embodies the provisionality that

“hatch[es] any art,” as John Palattella argues (1993, 36). As a figure for language, the monument illustrates an ambiguous moment in Bishop’s theory of pretence: the moment after the poet has begun to invent a new discourse but before that discourse has entirely colonized our ways of seeing. In this liminal space, language and “the world” are no longer—and not yet—out of proportion with each other; this is the moment of the artist’s greatest aesthetic and political power.

Although the two poems may represent divergent modes in Bishop’s oeuvre, “Florida” develops a politics of description not unlike that of “The Monument,” which we have learned to read as substantively engaged with thirties politics (see, especially, Palatella 1993). In different ways, both poems illuminate the process by which we make monuments of language, or what Bishop describes, paraphrasing William Empson, as “the tendency . . . of what a poet writes to become real” (2006, 184). If we think of “Florida” as another of Bishop’s monuments, we can see that she accepts the necessity of artifice in even the most “natural” world. Indeed, the ornamental debris of Florida’s landscape seems to “give it away,” like that other half-organic structure, “as having life, and wishing; / wanting to be a monument” (1983, 24). Tempting though it may be to think of “Florida” as a deflationary account of human temporality and significance, it bears the marks of human desire from its first line (“The state with the prettiest name . . .”), a desire that, by naming the state for one of its features, begins to designate the sphere of its reference. This power to name—what Jacqueline Brogan calls “that act of naming, the telling of ‘the story,’ the scripting of our lives” (2001, 518)²³—is a crucial part of the mechanics of pretence that “Florida” embodies and ultimately interrupts. Referring to “The Monument,” Vernon Shetley argues that “whatever is commemorated by this monument is itself unavailable” and that the structure, “while it may be a tomb, is also an origin. . . . Bishop’s monuments are not fixed and final but capable of transformation” (1993, 41). Bishop’s Florida is also a tomb and set of origin stories, and the girl buried in it is lost in perhaps the most important senses: we have to call her “princess” because we have no less exotic term, and she is singular, without community.

On the other hand, this land is not a cenotaph. Bishop’s speaker acknowledges that “what is within” the tombs and monuments we make of language “cannot have been intended to have been seen” (1983, 25) and then looks inside anyway, as far as she can. This is difficult to

see unless we look beyond “The Monument” to the porous figures of encryption that appear in her work—porous, that is, to imagination. Shetley’s reading of “The Monument” reverts instead to an old picture of Bishop as withdrawn, seeming to echo Marianne Moore’s early wish that Bishop would “risk some unprotected profundity of experience” (Moore 1997, 391). “If in recent years,” he writes, “we have come to read Eliot’s advocacy of artistic impersonality as a defense against a painful personal history, so we might also see Bishop’s attribution of life to an artifact as a means of evading questions of human agency” (Shetley 1993, 41).

Each of the poems discussed here enfolds a figure of partially indecipherable humanity, but this is just the point of a monument: like the structure in “The Monument,” edifices made of language bear the traces of the maker’s desire and show us an image of ourselves where we begin to be something else, something social. If we think of “Florida” as a kind of monument, a fluid arrangement of organic surfaces that partially conceal a human history, we will see that it is through the descriptive choices we make, and how we train our eyes as we describe, that we endow monuments with traces of ourselves, which in turn suggest lives of their own as we contemplate them. In the world as on the page, Bishop argues, this is the mechanics of pretence. The poet doesn’t evade agency in the monument; she exercises her most basic agency in its description. The speaker in “Florida” cannot see the Indian girl buried beneath her, but she perceives the surface of the earth-tomb in terms of her, and makes her own voice out of that girl’s calls.

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Notes

1. For a citation and discussion of Bishop's letter to Lowell, see Kalstone 1989. Bishop disapproved of Lowell's use of Elizabeth Hardwick's letters in his poetry, particularly since he changed them. She quotes Thomas Hardy in her reprimand: "What should certainly be protested against, in cases where there is no authorization, is the mixing of fact and fiction in unknown proportions. Infinite mischief would lie in that. If any statements in the dress of fiction are covertly hinted to be fact, all must be fact, and nothing else but fact" (quoted in Kalstone, 241). A few lines later she asserts that "*art just isn't worth that much.*" Elsewhere, Bishop claims that "I *always* tell the truth in my poems," and "it was all exactly the way I described it"; frequent qualifications such as "Oh, but I did change *one* thing" only seem to underscore her investment in the literal (quoted in Edelman 1985, 179).
2. For instance, Lorrie Goldensohn introduces her biography of the poet by claiming that "Elizabeth Bishop's pursuit of truth and accurate description always existed in fruitful tension with her defense of the unwilling and unconscious life of the mind" (1992, ix), and Margaret Dickie remarks that while "Bishop's letters and interviews are quite direct in identifying the events that started the poems" (1997, 2), "so specific are her explanations of the poems' sources that they seem contrived to hide any explanation of how or why the event was worked up into a particular poem it produced" (3).
3. According to Brett Millier (1995), Bishop drafted the essay in 1937; see Bishop 2006, 183n1.
4. Bishop's notebooks from the mid-thirties suggest that she was reading Wordsworth around the time she drafted "Mechanics of Pretence." In one entry, she characterizes the "Romantic" habit of "using the supposedly 'spiritual'—the beautiful, the nostalgic, the ideal and *poetic*, to produce the *material* [world]"—as a "great perversity" (quoted in Costello 1993, 4).
5. Indeed, Bishop's denaturalization of the poetry's power more closely echoes Nietzsche's claim that "the reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for—[is] originally almost always wrong and arbitrary. . . . All this grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body. What at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably the essence and effective as such" ([1882] 1974, 58).
6. Gillian White offers a similar interpretation of what Bishop refers to elsewhere as the "tradition of likenesses." White relates this "tradition" to "what Sir Philip Sidney called 'figuring foorth' or artistic formation—formings

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and feignings of the mess of 'reality' into likenesses and orderly shapes. It is more than mimesis, if by mimesis we simply mean imitation: it is something more like coherence making and hermeneutics" (2014, 53).

7. See Robert von Hallberg's discussion of American "poet-tourists" (1985, 62–92). Although Hallberg notes that Bishop was often critical of her status as a tourist, he suggests that her position as one of the "world's consumers" (86) could only be half-ironic. Appraisals of Bishop as an aesthete, and of her poetry as politically disengaged, were common until the mid-nineties; as Jeffrey Gray notes, "The idea of [Bishop's] work as 'descriptive,' as withholding emotion, and of the poet as content to receive impressions" (2005, 26) is well-entrenched. Take, for instance, Millier's claim that "since [Bishop's] uncommitted path through the left-leaning 1930s, Elizabeth had been uncomfortable in the presence of political commitment" (1995, 200), preferring a "wholly esthetic appreciation of the country, the landscape, and the people" (274).

8. See, for example, Kirstin Hotelling Zona's *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (2002).

9. Other interesting accounts of Bishop's relationship to war include Barry 1999, Fountain 1999, Dickie 1997, and Pickard 2009, 98–124.

10. This and other theorizations of Bishop's skepticism—a category that at its most productive bridges the political and aesthetic—have built on the work of James Longenbach, who argues that "the problem for Bishop, early and late, was not her values as such but her discomfort—nurtured in the thirties—with the conventions of political poetry" (1995, 468). In the same spirit, John Palattella observes that Bishop's "style is divested of politics only if we acquiesce to the critical standards she questioned . . . —that a lack of historical totality implies no interest in political issues" (1993, 26).

11. Pickard notes that while readers often celebrate Bishop's precise descriptions, when "applied with more malign intent, 'descriptive' implies a limiting obsession with brute reality, a lack of imagination that prevents Bishop from seeing beyond the here and now. This second, derogatory sense of the word usually lurks in the background, and even those who label Bishop descriptive with the best intentions are eager to move on" (2009, 3).

12. At the time, MacLeish was the librarian of Congress. See MacLeish 1941, 103–21.

13. This argument is related to Pickard's claim that what Bishop's poems "do to" the reader is often different from what they express about the poem's subject or object: "The central goal of her poetry is not so much to relate

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an emotional experience (though it may) as to trigger one in the reader. . . . Her intensive poetics is organized around controlling the reader's imagination directly rather than inspiring it to vibrate sympathetically in the Romantic style" (2009, 35).

14. Shakespeare frequently uses this designation for scenes of battle or interludes between fighting; the direction appears in *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Julius Caesar*, among others. However, it is in act 2, scene 5 of *Henry VI*, part 3—which depicts many of the most significant battles in the Wars of the Roses—that the speaker contemplates a “badly lit” battle scene that

fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light,
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day nor night. (II, v, 1–4)

He further compares the war among men to a war of weather:

Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind;
Now one the better, then another best—
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast. (9–11)

And, like Bishop's speaker, King Henry envisions his own distance from the war and the potential immunity of noninvolvement, imagining a pastoral life rather than a martial one.

15. An exception is Thomas Travisano's interesting discussion of the poem (1988), 94–96.

16. Palattella reads this letter as part of Bishop's ongoing exploration of “how poetry could engage social conditions without adopting politics ‘as such,’ which for her was a politics committed to a cocksure, dogmatic ideology that squelches speculation” (1993, 20).

17. In particular, “we” protest the rooster's power to wake us into a violent order that is linguistically inscribed, as in the arbitrary repetition of “here”:

what right have you to give
commands and tell us how to live,

cry ‘Here!’ and ‘Here!’
and wake us here where are
unwanted love, conceit, and war?” (Bishop 1983, 36)

18. See, especially, Gray, who argues that the Brazilian landscape becomes “a trope of nature-as-text” in which “the worlds of representation and geographic reality . . . are indistinguishable,” so that “we are never sure whether we are on

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the 'real' geographic journey or on the textual, 'engravable' one" (2005, 32). Gray cites Jacinta Matos on the poetic text as a recapitulation of a journey in which "a prior text is articulated with a present narrative" and "the old journey serves . . . both as pretext and pre-text" (251n9). Of course, "Brazil" invites the comparison of poet and imperialist from its first lines onward: "Januaries, Nature greets our eyes— / exactly as she must have greeted theirs" (Bishop 1983, 91). The multiplicity of "Januaries" alerts us to the cyclicity of vision and the inescapable fact that our experience is primed by old mythologies. Thus, as Longenbach argues, "the poem is more than an unveiling of Portuguese colonialism; it is also a recognition of the possibility of Bishop's—or anyone's—complicity in the continuing imposition of [colonialism's] values" (1997, 30).

19. In fact, Bishop suggests that neoimperialist exploration is a theater of pretence that may also endanger its audience, even as it delights them. "Questions of Travel" uses the stage play as an explicit figure for a type of disengaged consumption that makes the poem's speaker uncomfortable. Faced with a foreign landscape that is simultaneously alien and overfamiliar, she asks: "Is it right to be watching strangers in a play / in this strangest of theaters?" (1983, 93).

20. Gray is quoting "Arrival at Santos," another of Bishop's "touristic" poems: "Oh, tourist, / is this how this country is going to answer you / and your immodest demands for a different world . . . ?" (1983, 89). Gillian White puts the question in terms of the cultural commodification accomplished by commercial advertisements and state propaganda: "What constitutes genuine experience if the language with which one experiences or describes it is inherited and often already commodified for us?" (2014, 82).

21. Indeed, the notion of forcing a language into being seems to darkly echo the language of "those maddening little women who kept calling, / calling" (Bishop 1983, 92), a language that has also been "forced" into being as a response to the conquistadores' violence. As Robert von Hallberg argues, "The imperialist is out to deceive himself as well as others: protests must be heard as songs of joy. At the basis of imperialism (and of tourism too) is a tempting deception that mocks most human interchange" (1985, 87).

22. Gray argues that the conquistadores' "pursuit is not successful. The densely woven textus of Nature provides inexhaustible paths of recession for the native women, paths the Christian predators find hard to follow" (2005, 39).

23. In her discussion of "The Burglar of Babylon," Brogan argues that by refusing to tell us the "moral" of his story—subverting one of the good-night ballad's generic conventions—the poem's burglar resists the linguistic violence

of a society whose "scripting" (2001, 524) of cautionary tales criminalizes the individual by obscuring society's culpability. "Not the crime of stealing money," she concludes, "but the crime of refusing to steal—to borrow 'the' language and its story of guilt, confession, and warning—constitutes his real crime." We might extend Brogan's argument that language may be "the real criminal" (518) to less manifestly "political" poems like "Little Exercise" and "Florida," which draw our attention to the subtle acts of pretence by which language acquires the power to "con-script."

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“Bullets for Hands”: Witter Bynner, Arthur Davison Ficke, and the *Spectra* Poems of World War I

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Originally conceived as a parody of the avant-garde literary movements of its day (for example, Imagism, Vorticism, Futurism, Chorism), the anthology *Spectra: A Book of Poetic Experiments* was published in 1916. Its authors, Emanuel Morgan and Anne Knish, were really Witter Bynner and Arthur Davison Ficke respectively, and they kept up their facade for nearly two years, producing unexpectedly striking poetry in the process, including some of the most resonant responses to World War I. For Spectrism’s detractors, of course, the whole thing was easily dismissible as a joke. However, in an August 1918 letter responding to criticism of the hoax in *Poetry* magazine, the secret finally out, Bynner (still using the Morgan name) sought to clarify the meaning of *Spectra* as he saw it, stating his genuine affirmation of the anthology’s work beyond the satiric circumstances of its creation: “Having given vent to Witter Bynner’s irritation at smug and pedantic pretences, Emanuel Morgan soon found himself a liberated identity glad to be agog with a sort of laughing or crying abandon, of which, in other poets, the New England soul of Witter Bynner had been too conscientiously suspicious” (Morgan 1918, 287). Clearly, then, Spectrism had become something more than merely a joke and, for Bynner, it quickly assumed a much deeper and, as I argue here, long-term significance.

Though many of his literary colleagues were angry at having been taken in by the hoax, Bynner was not alone in defending the work of the disguised *Spectra* poets. For example, William Marion Reedy, editor of the influential journal *Reedy’s Mirror*, wrote in 1919 that “some of their pseudonymous performances were better stuff than they had ever done under or over their own names” (1919, xvi). Not only is the work of Knish and Morgan valuable poetry in its own right, but the Spectrist project also sheds light on contemporary perceptions of Imagism and

Vorticism, movements now seen as canonical in early modernism but whose principles and stances were not initially uncontested. As Leonard Diepeveen avers, “mock” texts like *Spectra* “don’t just mock, . . . they interpret modernism’s works and the movement as a whole, the social conditions that were granting it attention, and the conditions under which someone could take such work seriously” (2014, 9). Another such serious but understudied context for understanding Spectrism is as documenting a reaction to modernism’s signal event, the First World War. Though this aspect of *Spectra* has rarely been commented on in recent decades, Bynner and Ficke, in publishing what they originally conceived of as a hoax, also made an important intervention into the contemporary discourse of the war. Thus, engaging with *Spectra* beyond its hoax limitations allows us to explore its wider aesthetic and sociopolitical relevance to that period, as well as to Bynner’s and Ficke’s other work.

The first public appearance of Spectrism came in June 1916, as the First World War raged in Europe, with a provocative new manifesto appearing in the American literary journal the *Forum*. Titled “The Spectric School of Poetry” and authored by Knish and Morgan, the essay opened by attacking Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis’s recent Vorticist departure in no uncertain terms: “The Vorticist School of poetry died an ignominious death in London, snuffed out by the explosion of the war. This was no great loss, because the experiments of this school, though interesting, were actuated by a wrong theory of poetic expression” (1916b, 675). Inextricably informed by the presence of the Great War, the Spectrists also clearly intended to wage a poetic war. Their *Spectra* anthology followed that autumn from the publisher Mitchell Kennerley and garnered much notice. Said to be based in Pittsburgh, Knish and Morgan were soon joined by a third member of the group, Elijah Hay (in real life, Marjorie Allen Seiffert, another well-known poet of the early twentieth-century modernist period), and in January 1917 the three contributed additional work to a special “Spectric School” issue of the little magazine *Others*, edited by Alfred Kreyborg. The movement was for the most part taken quite seriously and lasted until Bynner revealed the secret in April 1918.

William Jay Smith’s *The Spectra Hoax* (1961) is still the fullest account of this fascinating episode in modernist poetic history, but for Smith its relevance lies solely in its parodic aspects: “While *Spectra* was merely a joke, it did much to clear the air of the stuffiness that tends to gather about literature when it loses its sense of humor and earnest but lumbering personalities take over” (1961, 67). Smith lists the “lumbering personalities” satirized in *Spectra* as the prime movers of Imagism and

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the various champions of the New Poetry of the 1910s. In particular, he names Amy Lowell as “the target” (37),¹ though in the 1916 *Forum* essay, Knish and Morgan attacked both Imagism and Vorticism, implicating Pound as well. While Max Putzel observes with interest that “the Spectrist movement twined through all the intricate politics that had overtaken the poetic revival” ([1963] 1998, 231), Smith’s 70-page treatment goes on to describe Spectrist poetry as mere “nonsense” (1961, 18). The *Spectra* poems that deal with the Great War escape Smith’s attention, for example, and he is content to exploit the episode as a stick with which to beat the poetic avant-garde of both his time and theirs.

More recent criticism of Spectrism has illuminated issues of identity suggested by the participants’ use of different personae. Suzanne Churchill, for example, explores the poets’ subversion of gender roles and sexual orientation through their publication in little magazines such as *Others*. Her reading is valuable and insightful, but, following Smith, it too reenacts the dichotomy between the ostensible “conservatism” of the real Bynner and Ficke and the experimental nature of their hoax work: “Much to the shock of its enthusiasts, however, Spectrism proved to be merely a masquerade—a hoax concocted by conservative poets, Witter Bynner and Arthur Davison Ficke, to expose the pretensions of modernist poets and audiences alike, especially the *Others* extremists” (2007, 178).² Cristanne Miller, in her 2007 article, analyzes the Spectrists’ engagement of Jewish identity (with particular regard to Anne Knish): “Posing as affiliated with Europe, (converted) Jewish, and multilingual placed these poets squarely in the circumstances [William Carlos] Williams, [Lola] Ridge, and [Mina] Loy associated with the birth of the new American idiom and of modern poetry itself—namely that of adapting to change through the personal experience of radical cultural difference” (2007, 468). Like Churchill, Miller’s primary concern is with the performance of identity, but she provides a more sympathetic portrait of Spectrism than previously existed, treating its pseudonymous figures as effectually real poets, the parodic impetus of the project notwithstanding.³

In fact, neither Bynner nor Ficke was especially conservative, politically or poetically. Their politics (which were on the progressive side of the spectrum), however, do help to account for their oppositional stances toward both Pound and Lowell. Noting Bynner’s early support for the women’s suffrage movement, his biographer James Kraft goes on to highlight the “intense commitment to a type of democracy in America to which Whitman led him—the inclusive and generous world of diverse and independent people relishing their differences and living

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openly with them" (1995, 24) (exemplified in Bynner's 1915 collection *The New World*). The contrast with Pound's burgeoning fascism, elitism, and Eurocentrism is quite clear here, but while Pound's politics are well known, Lowell's own conservatism, elitism, nativism, and wartime jingoism are less often remarked on (perhaps because she herself is often read in contrast to Pound, and often lauded for her flouting of gender stereotypes). In *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* (2011), Melissa Bradshaw points out that "during the years surrounding World War One, a pivotal moment in United States' history, as the country struggled to define and defend its ideological identity and its role in international politics," Lowell had a series of photographic portraits taken of herself in "a concerted effort to construct a conservative public persona": "The photographs subtly reinforce the anti-progressive, nativist patriotism subtending her lectures and critical writings on the creation of a definitively American poetics" (2011, 80). Where Bradshaw further characterizes Lowell during the war years as "a conservative, anti-socialist heiress" (83), "an emphatic proponent of United States involvement in the war, [and] a nativist" (84), Bynner was a pacifist who, in a 1917 letter to the *New York Tribune*, defended the rights of a suddenly besieged German-American population: "I am not opposing majority rule. I am only urging people against such Prussian folly as military or police suppression of law-abiding minorities" (1979, 270). Bynner thus had reasons to attack Lowell that went far beyond his annoyance with her perceived Imagist pomposity.

In regard to Ficke, William Roba observes that "Ficke had been an early supporter of Harriet Monroe's experimental magazine, *Poetry*. In the summer of 1912, he commented that 'the project has a fine ring to it—I rejoice to see that the Bull Moose movement is not confined to politics'" (1983, 54). Though light-hearted, this comment nonetheless implies an open attitude toward both the New Poetry and political progressivism. John Timberman Newcomb's recent study *How Did Poetry Survive? The Making of Modern American Verse*, gives a reading of Ficke's 1916 free-verse poem "The Dancer" as an endeavor on his part "to look critically at social distinctions and to identify himself with otherness," placing it among a handful of contemporary poems that "constituted one of the period's most significant critiques of the links between gender inequality and economic exploitation" (2012, 94). In an even earlier poem, "Lines for Two Futurists" (1915), Ficke had already tentatively begun to align himself with the radical poetry of the new generation. Ironically composing this poem in rhymed tercets, Ficke wonders, "Why does all of sharp and new / That our modern days can brew / Culminate in you?" (1915a, 48).

Portraying the lone “Futurist” out “On the broken wall . . . / Peering toward some stony land,” he pities his seemingly dismal fate, having rejected “Simple things and dear.”

Yet suddenly Ficke’s speaker sees himself, uncomfortably perhaps, in this very same figure: “I too stand where you have stood; / And the fever fills my blood / With your cruel mood.” Despite some trepidation at leaving behind the comforts of convention, the poem concludes with the speaker actually joining the Futurist on the periphery:

Yet I come! I cannot stay!
Be it bitter night, or day
Glorious,—your way

I must tread. . . . (50)

Despite Ficke’s sometimes traditionalist reputation (often writing in the sonnet form, for example), we see him here participating in the social and poetic ferment of his era—indeed, he is clearly the second “Futurist” of the poem’s title. Newcomb discusses the meaning of the term “Futurism” at this time, noting that more conventional literary journals such as the *Dial* saw poetry itself as “menaced by an ultramodern fringe that they called ‘Futurism,’ which in 1913 had become a catchall pejorative in American magazines, signifying everything that was threatening and incomprehensible about the modern arts” (2012, 40–41). Even before he became Anne Knish, then, Ficke had already begun to identify with the “threatening” new movement, suggesting an element of complexity that is often overlooked in his work of this period.

The bulk of the *Spectra* anthology also consists of well-crafted poems that speak to their cultural and historical moment, including the then ongoing war. It should be no surprise that the *Spectra* poets would react to the events in Europe. Having dragged on for two years when the anthology appeared (in 1916), the war became the central event of the modernist period, the significance of which Knish and Morgan acknowledge in their *Forum* article (with their aforementioned opening observation that Vorticism had been “snuffed out by the explosion of the war” [1916b, 675]). As it happened, the United States entered World War I just a year later (April 1917), and Ficke himself served as an Army captain in France (see Hart 1987, 90). However, American poets certainly did not wait until 1917 to write about the war. In his Introduction to *Rendezvous with Death: American Poems of the Great War*, Mark Van Wienen argues that, as opposed to the British model of the “soldier-poet” (for example, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac

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Rosenberg), American poets responding to the war “demonstrate, quite unequivocally, that frontline battle experience was *not* necessary to protest war effectively” (2002, 10). *Poetry* magazine jumped in immediately, publishing their war-themed issue (with work by Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, and Richard Aldington, among others) in November 1914, only a few months after the fighting began. Bynner and Ficke were undoubtedly aware of all this, and *Spectra* became a means of taking part in the discussion.

Of the *Spectra* anthology’s forty-six poems, at least four respond directly to the war (aside from another ten or so that more broadly dwell on themes of death and decay). For examining these poems in depth, however, it will be helpful to consider the Spectrist method in general, especially in terms of the rhetorical distinctions between Spectrism and the other “schools,” and the distinctions between it and the work of Bynner and Ficke as themselves. In the 1916 *Forum* essay, Knish and Morgan, in apparently nonparodic language, expand on their contention that the Vorticists “were actuated by a wrong theory of poetic expression”: “These writers underestimated the amount of clarity which even the most daring poetic sketches must have; as a result, their works hardly resembled human speech”—and thus, “a measurable degree of communication” remains an aim of Spectrism (1916b, 675). Regarding Imagism, Knish and Morgan are somewhat less harsh, intimating that they might have had something in common with that group in regard to poetics, were it not “suicidally advertised by a concerted reciprocal chorus of poet-reviewers” (677). The propaganda skills of both Pound and Lowell, the former’s successor as “leader” of the Imagists, have been widely noted, and clearly this is something Spectrism reacts against.

Despite these measured words about Imagism, in sharp contrast to Pound’s dictum, “Go in fear of abstractions” (1913, 201), Spectrist poetry is heavily metaphoric and allusive. The Knish preface to the *Spectra* anthology sets out three related meanings of the term *Spectric*:

In the first place, it speaks, to the mind, of that process of diffraction by which are disarticulated the several colored and other rays of which light is composed. It indicates our feeling that the theme of a poem is to be regarded as a prism, upon which the colorless white light of infinite existence falls and is broken up into glowing, beautiful, and intelligible hues. In its second sense, the term Spectric relates to the reflex vibrations

of physical sight, and suggests the luminous appearance which is seen after exposure of the eye to intense light, and, by analogy, the after-colors of the poet's initial vision. In its third sense, Spectric connotes the overtones, adumbrations, or spectres which for the poet haunt all objects both of the seen and the unseen world,—those shadowy projections, sometimes grotesque, which, hovering around the real, give to the real its full ideal significance and its poetic worth.

(Knish and Morgan 1916a, ix-x)

Far from being able to present any true image directly, Knish argues, poetry is a mediated and mediating form. The subject of the poem is inevitably "diffracted," like Cubist art, into constituent parts and then rendered into something original through language. Given the "luminous appearance which is seen after exposure of the eye to intense light," there is more than one possible image of the thing seen; light waves transmit an image, but they might also distort the viewer's sense of sight, creating "after-colors" that can be as interesting or substantial as the "real" image. Summing up the distinction between Spectrism and Imagism, in *The Young Idea* (1917), his contemporary volume on the New Poetry, Lloyd Morris writes: "The Spectrists thus seem, in a measure, to be chiefly interested in blurring and encircling with a haze of symbols the image which the Imagists, in their poems, are anxious to convey with photographic precision" (1917, 99-100).

Certainly, the third definition of *Spectric* (it "connotes the overtones, adumbrations, or spectres which for the poet haunt all objects both of the seen and the unseen world") takes much from Symbolism, with its emphasis on evocation, obscurity, the irrational, and the connection between the inner and the outer realms. An example of this can be seen in Morgan's "Opus 47,"⁴ where, in a dreamlike or even visionary state, the speaker and an unnamed lover transcend the ordinary world:

You open the window to myriad windows,
 The high triangular door of the world . . .
 Till the walls and the roofs and the curious keystone,
 The carven rose with its petals uncurled,

Are swayed in the swathe of the uppermost ether,
 Where stars are the columns upholding a dome
 (Knish and Morgan 1916a, 37-38; ellipsis in original)

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Though lush with description, it is clearly of the “unseen” kind. Having reached the supernal plane, the two figures then merge into one: “We stand on the rose, we are images golden, / We move interchanging, attaining one crest” (38). Such scenes could never be described with, to use Morris’s term, “photographic precision”—they are necessarily adumbrated—yet even if such phrases as “the window to myriad windows,” “triangular door of the world,” “the curious keystone,” and “images golden” cannot be explained logically, they “haunt” or “hover around the real,” working, like Symbolist poetry, by suggestion and association.

The Spectrist gesture toward Symbolism is not merely coincidental, and the influence of the poet Remy de Gourmont looms large here. In fact, Morgan dedicates the whole *Spectra* anthology “to Remy de Gourmont”:

Poet, a wreath!—
No matter how we had combined our flowers,
You would have worn them—being ours. . . .
On you, on them, the showers—
O roots beneath!

(Knish and Morgan 1916a, vii; ellipsis in original)

Gourmont, now somewhat overlooked in the English-speaking world, was a highly regarded French Symbolist poet, lauded by many in the early twentieth century. He is perhaps best known for his long poem “Litanies of the Rose” (1892), with its anaphoric list of differently colored roses (symbolizing various aspects of the feminine) and a repeating chorus, “Fleur hypocrite, / Fleur du silence” (Gourmont 1896, 206). Quite possibly, the phrase “our flowers” in Morgan’s dedication alludes to this poem, though Bynner claimed that the term *Spectrism* initially came from the ballet *Le Spectre de la rose*, which he saw in Chicago in February 1916 (see Smith 1961, 18). At any rate, Gourmont’s work offered a touchstone as he began fleshing out the movement’s principles. In his study of the influence of Gourmont on Pound and Imagism, Richard Sieburth observes, “Such was the vogue for the author of the *Litanies* . . . that Witter Bynner’s contemporary American parody of modernist verse, *Spectra*, was dedicated to Gourmont” (1978, 31). One line of “Litanies of the Rose” begins, “Rose couleur de paille, diamant jaune parmi les crudités du prisme [Rose the color of straw, yellow diamond among the crudities of the prism]” (Gourmont 1896, 208; my translation), with “les crudités du prisme” suggesting the basic color-elements of light and perhaps inspiring the Spectrist conceit that “a poem is to be regarded as a prism.”

Significantly, Gourmont was also claimed by Pound, who wrote the French poet's obituary in the January 1916 issue of *Poetry*. There Pound writes, "Suffice it to say that the litanies are a marvel of rhythm, that they have not been followed or repeated, that M. de Gourmont was not of 'the young French school.' If he is 'grouped' anywhere he must be grouped, as poet, among *les symbolistes*. The litanies are evocation, not statement" (1916, 201). Bynner would certainly have encountered this tribute in *Poetry*, which appeared the month before he began formulating Spectrism, and he might have taken Pound's claim that Gourmont had "not been followed or repeated" as a kind of challenge, seeing it as an opportunity. Where Pound's conception of Imagism is actually a departure from Gourmont, as Sieburth argues (1978, 12–13), it is not hard to imagine Bynner consciously seeking to fill in a gap by imagining a rival avant-garde that does in fact follow Gourmont (emphasizing in its method "evocation, not statement"). Lowell had also written about Gourmont in her critical volume *Six French Poets*, where, despite casting herself as an admirer, her compliments are backhanded, and she delivers some outright putdowns, remarking, for example, that Gourmont is "the least considerable" of the poets under consideration and that "nowhere among his poems is there one which can be considered a masterpiece" (1915, 107). Bynner's embrace of Gourmont does double duty, then, allowing him in different ways to counter his two primary modernist rivals.

The invention of Spectrism, of course, was also bound up in the specter of the European war. By early 1916, as Bynner sought to position himself vis-à-vis Imagism and Vorticism, the war was in full swing (though it would be another year before the United States would declare its part in it). In Pound's same January 1916 obituary for Gourmont in *Poetry* magazine, he frames the French poet's death as a casualty of the war, going so far as to argue that it was

another of the crimes of the war, for M. de Gourmont was only fifty-seven, and if he had not been worried to death, if he had not been grieved to death by the cessation of all that has been "life" as he understood it, there was no reason why we should not have had more of his work and his company.

He is as much "dead of the war" as if he had died in the trenches, and he left with almost the same words on his lips. "Nothing is being done in Paris, nothing can be done, *faute de combattants*." (1916, 197)

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The tone of Gourmont's latter statement, Pound then claims, is "almost the same tone in which Gaudier-Brzeska wrote to me a few days before he was shot at Neuville St. Vaast: 'Is anything of importance or even of interest going on in the world—I mean the "artistic London?"' Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, the French artist and Pound's Vorticist colleague killed in action in June 1915 at the age of twenty-three here alluded to, highlights the effects of the Great War on the production of art. In this homage to Gourmont, Pound thus links the Symbolist poet to the recently killed Vorticist sculptor, and if, as is likely, Bynner knew of this essay and was perhaps inspired by it (even if as a foil), the connections could not have been lost on him. Many of Bynner's own interests were at stake—not only would Spectrism counter Vorticism and Imagism, it would also be partly framed as an independent, American response to the calamity of the war.

Both as himself and as Emanuel Morgan, Bynner was unabashedly against the First World War and American involvement in it. Morgan's "Opus 63," a poem influenced by Gourmont's "litany" form, presents the "seven deathly spears of memory" (Knish and Morgan 1916a, 23), with each "spear" representing a country or region and connected to a color. The seventh spear is

The spear of Europe,
Red,
In the mouth's breath,
The million-splintering scream of death . . .

(24; ellipsis in original)

As Van Wienen observes, "American poets tended at first to denounce the European conflict as a colossal waste of humanity and culture" (2002, 5), and Morgan's stanza is a case in point, responding to the war with an inchoate, existential scream, the spear, it seems, hitting "the mouth's breath," thus rendering any more articulate response impossible. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet points out that "injuries to the face and especially the mouth are often portrayed in [war literature] as instances of the worst kind of wound precisely because they are so dehumanizing in their effect. . . . They deprive their victims of the ability to speak and reassert their humanity through language" (2013, 177). In describing the "spear of Europe" in this way in "Opus 63," Morgan stands against the war by reducing it to an exaggerated, abstract image that reveals its dehumanizing effects. If this trope is a common one, as Monnet suggests, because it highlights the connection between language and humanity, then Morgan/

Bynner here implicitly posits poetry (arguably the quintessence of language) as a form of positive resistance to the nihilism of war.

Bynner's own political stance, as noted above, was similarly pacifist. Regarding the United States' entry into the war, in a 1917 letter to the artist Barry Faulkner, he wrote:

I believe that it is necessary for those of us with faith in something higher than the state to be very careful of our way, to adhere with cautious judgment and conscience and, if we must, to resist. No force on earth could make me kill. . . . There must be "peace without victory." Then, it seems to me, would come the real victory, inside Germany and inside Britain, and inside the United States. (Bynner 1981, 60–61)

Setting himself against militarism and imperialism, Bynner at the time leading up to and including this letter was swimming against the political tide. With the exigency of the war clearly informing the Spectrist project, however, it is understandable that Bynner's own views would filter in through the mouthpiece of Morgan. As Van Wienen shows, poetry was an important platform for arguments about America's involvement in the war: "At a number of junctures during the Great War, poetry did in fact fulfill a self-consciously political, and politically transformative, role" (1997, 16). Such poetic discussions went on throughout the war years, with the aforementioned war issue of *Poetry* magazine (November 1914), for example, and the selections in Van Wienen's 2002 anthology. In *Spectra*, we see that Morgan's opposition to the war lines up with Bynner's; in a largely nonparodic way, Bynner was eager to seize the moment.

One of the most striking of all the *Spectra* war poems is Bynner/Morgan's "Opus 29." Combining rhyme with surreal and violent imagery, it offers a harrowing vision of a killing machine:

Knives for feet, and wheels for a chin,
And the long smooth iron bore for a neck,
And bullets for hands. . . . And the root runs in,
The root of blood no stone can check,
From the breasts of the grinding crash of sin,
From engines hugging in a wreck.

(Knish and Morgan 1916a, 31; ellipsis in original)

In a grotesque mockery of modern-era mechanized warfare and its dehumanizing effects, the system substitutes weapons for body parts, as

the human becomes robot. If the phrase “engines hugging in a wreck” perhaps recalls the car accident that F. T. Marinetti describes in his “Futurist Manifesto” (1909), a document that overtly glorifies war, here in time of an actual war Bynner/Morgan’s poem focuses on its horrors. The second stanza’s alliteration and assonance stress the destruction—“A thousand round-red mouths of pain / Blaring black, / A twisting comrade on his back”—before “back” is eventually rhymed with the Imagistic “sun on a bayonet-stack” (Knish and Morgan 1916a, 31).

The poem’s final lines insist on the horror beneath the patriotic or religious shibboleths that urge young men to war:

Country, a babble of black spume . . .
 Faith, an eyeball in the sand . . .
 Mother, a nail through a broken hand—
 A kissing fume—
 And out of her breast the bloody bubbling milk-red breath
 Of death. (32; ellipses in original)

With “a babble of black spume” and “bloody bubbling milk-red breath,” the lines suggest the effects of poison gas, and linking that with the sardonic subversion of patriotism uncannily anticipates Owen’s famous poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” (which was not written until 1917, and eventually published posthumously in 1920). Though Van Wienen has quite convincingly demonstrated that American poets were making significant contributions to the corpus of Great War poetry long before the more canonical British “soldier-poets” came to prominence, we still tend to think of the likes of Owen, Rosenberg, and Sassoon as defining the poetic mood of the period. Yet, as Van Wienen also points out, however horrific their war imagery could be, soldier-poets such as the aforementioned “never were able to construct an effective resistance against World War I. . . . Rosenberg and Owen did not have significant numbers of their poems published until after their deaths and after the war; their protest against the war was largely a private, personal affair” (1997, 28). With “Opus 29,” however, Bynner/Morgan seeks to influence American public opinion at a moment (1916) when the country’s role in the war was still up for debate, however futile this attempt may have been in retrospect.

One image in this poem, the “eyeball in the sand” of line 20, bears a close resemblance to a line from Wallace Stevens’s poem “Phases,” published in *Poetry*’s war issue. Stevens’s second section begins:

This was the salty taste of glory,
 That it was not
 Like Agamemnon's story.
 Only, an eyeball in the mud (1914, 70)

Bynner knew Stevens well from their mutual time at Harvard and in New York City,⁵ so Bynner's maneuver here in "Opus 29" seems more like something of an in-joke than either overt plagiarism or the type of rebuke that Spectrism aimed at Lowell. Bynner and Ficke had even wished to coopt Stevens as a Spectrist, nearly mentioning his name in *Spectra's* preface as a poet who independently utilized their method, before finally deciding that, as Smith ironically relates, "the passage was too serious for inclusion" (1961, 67).⁶ Whatever the case about Stevens's and Morgan's shared "eyeball" image, or the former as a putative proto-Spectrist, "Opus 29" makes a powerful statement against the war.

While the *Spectra* war poems are largely serious, further elements of humor thread their way throughout the volume, not surprisingly given its satirical impetus. Morgan's "Opus 79," which closes the *Spectra* anthology, plays wryly on the pseudonymous nature of the project itself. It begins with the quatrain,

Only the wise can see me in the mist,
 For only lovers know that I am here . . .
 After his piping, shall the organist
 Be portly and appear?
 (Knish and Morgan 1916a, 66; ellipsis in original)

With hindsight, the joke is obvious, but at the time of publication Bynner most likely felt himself laughing internally, or among a very small group of insiders. Again there is an element of the "unseen" here, as Bynner's true identity remains for now concealed, as if he himself is the spectric ghost haunting the poem (which, in a way, he is). Brian McHale points out that such ironic gesturing toward the question of authorship is in fact characteristic of what he terms the "mock-hoax" poem: "In mock-hoaxes, issues of authenticity and inauthenticity are elevated to the level of literary 'raw materials.' . . . Mock-hoax poems are made out of inauthenticity, and out of inauthenticity they make self-reflective art" (2003, 237), and, indeed, McHale asserts, they are created in order to eventually be seen through. Accordingly, Bynner/Morgan seems to suggest here at the outset of the project that he may be only half-joking, as the concluding lines to

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"Opus 79" forecast the eventual unmasking of the true author: "Someday touch me, all you wish, / In the wide sea" (Knish and Morgan 1916a, 66). Carl Sandburg once remarked, "I may yet live to write my argument that *Spectra* is a piece of creative art" (quoted in Smith 1961, ix), by which he meant that embedded within the Spectrist parody or "hoax" is real poetry, encompassing real sociopolitical commentary.

As Anne Knish, Arthur Ficke also readily parodied Imagism and Vorticism, while combining Symbolist strategies and his own commentary on the Great War. The Knish poem that the *Spectra* preface identifies as particularly illustrative of the method is "Opus 76" (Knish and Morgan 1916a, xii). In the first stanza, its speaker proclaims, "I have seen the grey stars marching, / And the green bubbles in wine, / And there are Gothic vaults of sleep" (4), and from this dreamlike atmosphere the second stanza then introduces the poem's central metaphor:

My cathedral
Has one great spire
Tawny in the sunlight.
Gargoyles haunt its nave;
High up amid its dark arches
Forgotten songs live shadowy.
Gold and sardonyx
Deck its altars.
Its mighty roof
Is copper rivering with the rain.

This poem illustrates the Spectric "process of diffraction," its play of light and color, but the dominant hues are browns and shadows, with metallic tones punctuating the scene. More especially, "Opus 76" embodies the third aspect of the Spectrist method, conjuring the aforementioned "overtones, adumbrations, or spectres which for the poet haunt all objects both of the seen and the unseen world." The *Spectra* preface refers to "shadowy projections, sometimes grotesque," and these appear here as "Gothic vaults," "gargoyles," "dark arches," "forgotten songs."

However, the cathedral, its spire, the gargoyles, and the rain are also elements that occur in Lowell's prose-poem "The Bombardment," which first appeared in the 1914 *Poetry* war issue. It opens,

Slowly, without force, the rain drops into the city. It stops a moment on the carved head of Saint John, then slides on again, slipping and trickling over his stone cloak. It splashes from the

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lead conduit of a gargoyle, and falls from it in turmoil on the stones in the Cathedral square. Where are the people, and why does the fretted steeple sweep about in the sky? Boom! The sound swings against the rain. Boom, again! After it, only water rushing in the gutters, and the turmoil from the spout of the gargoyle. Silence. Ripples and mutters. Boom! (1914, 60)

The obvious references to the earlier piece reflect the wider poetic context in which the Spectrists were putting their work forward, as they make arguments about both contemporary poetry and the war that often reached beyond the simple hoax aspects of the project, including critiques of some of the era's most prominent poets such as Lowell.

While Ficke appropriates elements from "The Bombardment," he renders them, as Knish, in a vastly different manner than does Lowell, paradoxically creating something new. The Lowell poem describes the effect of an actual bombardment on various people in an unnamed European city, adopting the third-person point of view as if in a prose narrative: "A child wakes and is afraid, and weeps in the darkness. What has made the bed shake? 'Mother, where are you? I am awake.' 'Hush, my Darling, I am here.' 'But, Mother, something so queer happened, the room shook.' Boom!" (61). In contrast, "Opus 76" sets the violence in the future tense and renders the poem in the first person, with one particular speaker only. The war does not begin to encroach until the end. Deliberately eerie in its mood throughout, in a Symbolist (or even Gothic) manner, the poem ends with a third stanza suddenly rife with more grotesque, violent action:

Tomorrow lightning swords will come
And thunder of cannon.
They will unrivet this roof
Of mighty copper.
Before the eyes of my gargoyles,
In the sound of my forgotten songs,
They will take it.
And as the rain sluices down
I shall have to follow my roof into the war.

(Knish and Morgan 1916a, 4–5)

The cathedral, clearly identified with the speaker ("my gargoyles," "my forgotten songs," "my roof"), is now subject to the spoliations of war but in a strangely meticulous manner—the roof is somehow unriveted and

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carried off intact, rather than being simply bombed, as it is in Lowell's piece. Nonetheless, this surreal act of plunder will inevitably involve the speaker (whose world has been desolated and who is now beleaguered by the metaphorical rain) in the war as a combatant, like it or not. While in "Opus 76" the violence of the war has yet to occur, it is unavoidable, on the verge of enveloping the first-person speaker persona.

If these poems make real arguments about the war, beyond serving merely as a hoax, then "Opus 76" suggests that Ficke's stance departed somewhat from Bynner's strident pacifism, however reluctantly its speaker "shall have to follow [his/her] roof into the war." Knish's "Opus 187," to take another example, attempts a modulated critique of war as arising out of our own flawed human nature:

But I know this—
That the storms of contempt that sweep over us,
Ready to blast any edifice before them
Rise from the fathomless maelstrom
Of contempt for ourselves.
If there be a god,
May he preserve me
From striking with these lightnings
Those whom I love. (58)

Here, contemplating violence as part of our makeup leads the speaker to question even himself. But the poem is further complicated in the next, short stanza by the realization that the speaker of these lines is actually Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Saying which, / Zarathustra strolled on / Down Fifth Avenue." The unexpected appearance of the iconoclastic, imperious antiprophet on the streets of Pittsburgh exemplifies the madcap mode of certain of the *Spectra* poems, but at the same time it calls on the psychological insight of Nietzsche's work itself.⁷ In contrast to Bynner's personal assertions that "No force on earth could make me kill" and that one should "resist" the war effort, Ficke (as Knish) suggests that, for him anyway, the situation is more complex. In 1917, partly under pressure from his family, Ficke joined the United States Army with an officer's commission and sailed to France (where, as an oft-told Spectric chestnut has it, a fellow officer confided to an amused Ficke that he himself was in fact Anne Knish [for details, see Roba 1983, 53; Smith 1961, 28–29]).

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Writing as Knish required Ficke to approach the war from a different poetic standpoint, one that diverged both from what some of his American colleagues were doing and from what the British poets were starting to do—and even from what Ficke himself published under his own name. In this regard, it is instructive to compare the Knish work above with Ficke's "To the Beloved of One Dead," which appeared in the journal *Scribner's* in September 1917. Unlike his more oblique *Spectra* pieces, Ficke here comments on the war directly by addressing the lover of a recently killed soldier:

The sunlight shall not easily seem fair
To you again,
Knowing the hand that once amid your hair
Did stray so maddeningly,
Now listlessly
Is beaten into mire by summer rain. (1917, 289)

The awfulness of the war is starkly summed up in the image of the dead soldier's hand lying in the mud (which recalls Stevens's "Phases"). The contrast between the passion of physical love and the destruction of the body in death is, as Paul Fussell points out in his canonical study of World War I poetry, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, one of the primary tropes of the British poets: "On the one hand, sanctioned public mass murder. On the other, unlawful secret individual love. Again, severe dichotomy" (1975, 271). Ficke himself, then, also anticipates certain of the strategies of these soldier-poets (just as Bynner/Morgan's "Opus 29" anticipates Owen), in contrast to the Symbolist and psychological approaches of Anne Knish. The form of "To the Beloved of One Dead" (rhymed and metered sestets) further distinguishes it from the pseudonymous Knish work (written in *vers libre*) and further places Ficke in the camp of the mostly later-published British war poets, who tended toward the formal strategies of Georgian verse.

Like much of the British poets' work, the third and last stanza of "To the Beloved of One Dead" idealizes the dead soldier's sacrifice, but not without recognizing the terrible loss to an individual survivor:

He died amid the thunders of great war;
His glory cries
Even now across the lands; perhaps his star
Shall shine forever. . . .

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But for you, never
His wild white body and his thirsting eyes.
(Ficke 1917; ellipsis in original)

Once again, the soldier's glorious death is set against the pathos suggested by the waste of his physical, now overtly sexualized, body. Ficke was no stranger to elegizing the war dead, having in 1915 published two poems in honor of Rupert Brooke (with whom he had formed a bond when Brooke visited Chicago in 1914).⁸ For Newcomb, however, Brooke's poetic "portrayal of men about to go into hellish trench environments as 'swimmers into cleanness leaping' is a travesty" (2012, 66), and he discusses a letter from Floyd Dell to Ficke (dated September 16, 1915) in which Dell enclosed a poem that "condemns Brooke's delusional enthusiasm for the war as a form of nationalist currency, brought on by those who were now busy fetishizing his death for their own purposes" (67). "For Dell," Newcomb writes, "Brooke's life and death had become an appalling example of the conscription of literature into the patriotic and masculinist ideologies justifying the war." Yet Ficke is clearly guilty of this to an extent, practically deifying Brooke in his sonnet series "To Rupert Brooke" (published in *Poetry*, June 1915): "But you not as this age's sacrifice / Should have gone down; you were foredoomed to be / Not of the age, but of all time a light" (1915c, 114). Ficke's work as Knish declines such deification or fetishization, allowing him, for a brief moment, to step outside of the "delusional enthusiasm" embedded in Brooke's project. But "To the Beloved of One Dead," while it explores certain aspects of the war's human cost in perceptive, realistic terms, saw Ficke return to the idealizing tendencies of his Brooke elegies with the apparently uncritical assertion of the dead soldier's "glory."

In a strange coincidence, "To the Beloved of One Dead" was taken up by the anonymous author of an epistolary war narrative, published in 1918, called *The Love of an Unknown Soldier*. As the publisher John Lane describes in "An Explanation" (1918) at the start of the book, the manuscript is composed of unsent love letters written by a British officer to an American woman, apparently found in a red box hidden in a bunker in France, before finally being delivered to Lane. In one letter, the author recounts a fellow soldier dramatically handing him a copy of the issue of *Scribner's* in which the Ficke poem appeared: "Just as he was leaving, he threw in a copy of *Scribner's Magazine*, all tattered and splotched. It was an old copy, as most of our magazines are. 'There's a

poem in there,' he said; 'it's called, "To the Beloved of One Dead." It's true. Read it'" (Lane 1918, 101). The author goes on to discuss the poem, quoting the first and third stanzas verbatim, supposedly from memory, before commenting, "The poem was by a woman; I forgot to notice her name. It's too late now. But how did she, living in America, manage to express something which she had not seen, concerning which we, who have seen it, are inarticulate? Whenever I see a hand thrust out above the mud I have just such thoughts; 'the hand which once amid your hair did stray so maddeningly'" (102). In one respect, anyway, this passage confirms that, as Van Wienen argues, American poets offered effective commentary about the war, and that Ficke's poem resonated all the way across the Atlantic.

However, it is rather odd that the anonymous author of *The Love of an Unknown Soldier*, who is somehow able to accurately quote whole stanzas of "To the Beloved of One Dead," forgets the name of the author despite being certain that "she" was a woman. Given the murky provenance of the text to begin with, it seems possible that the author could in fact have been making a veiled reference to the *Spectra* hoax and Ficke's masquerade as the female Anne Knish. Critic Harold Orel explores the book's origins, suggesting that the whole thing may in fact be a "fictional contrivance," finally positing that "one might even begin to suspect John Lane's story of the lucky discovery of 'The MS. in a red box'" (1992, 219). By the time the book was being prepared for publication—John Lane's "Explanation" is dated September 1918—Bynner had revealed Spectrism's secret (during a lecture in April 1918), with accounts of the revelation reported in the major journals and newspapers in the months immediately following, including a story in the *New York Times Magazine* (see Smith 1961, 31–42; Ybarra 1918). Also in April, the editors of the *Dial* wondered "how far the [Spectrist] 'movement' might have gone but for the interruption of the war, which gave 'Miss Knish' a commission as Captain Arthur Davison Ficke" ("Casual" 1918, 411). It might be relevant here to note that Lane was publisher of the two issues of *Blast*, the journal of Vorticism, which Knish and Morgan had attacked in their *Forum* manifesto. If indeed it is the case that *The Love of an Unknown Soldier* alludes to the hoax aspects of the *Spectra* affair, then it seems that even Ficke's "real" war poetry could not be completely disentangled from his connection to Anne Knish—with the parodist himself here being subtly parodied.

If it is true that, as Knish and Morgan contended in 1916, Vorticism was “snuffed out by the explosion of the war,” then so ultimately was Spectrism as well. Smith writes that “the hoax might well have continued months longer had it not been for America’s entry into World War I; but it soon became impossible to joke about anything, even about the state of American letters” (1961, 28). Putzel concurs, noting, “By the following spring [1918] of bloody trench warfare, Bynner had grown weary of the business” ([1963] 1998, 239). Still, the *Spectra* poems demonstrate that the war weighed heavily on Bynner and Ficke even at the outset of their modernist experiments.⁹ They responded with some of the more formally unique and politically provocative war poems of the period, with the grotesquery of lines like Bynner’s “Knives for feet, and wheels for a chin, / And the long smooth iron bore for a neck, / And bullets for hands,” and Ficke’s “I shall have to follow my roof into the war,” sounding the surrealistic keynote that permeates much Spectrist work.

As the project came to a close, the problematic experience of pseudonymity (coupled with the war itself) had divergent effects on the career trajectories of the two poets. For Ficke, it seems to have caused him to reconsider his tentative embrace of the experimental aspects of the New Poetry. As Paula Hart avers, “Given the impact of his war experience . . . and his Spectric experiments, one might have expected bold departures in his next major collection, *Out of Silence and Other Poems* (1924). Instead, reviewers found the same blend of pleasant lyrics . . . and an odd mixture of contemporary and traditional” (1987, 91). No longer would Ficke contemplate identifying himself as a “Futurist,” as he had in 1915. And, despite Bynner’s claim in the 1918 *New York Times Magazine* article that Ficke had told him “some of my best work is in *Spectra*!” (Ybarra 1918), he would never again write in the Spectrist mode. Such a revision of poetic strategies might have been stabilizing from his perspective at the time, but Ficke does not have a lot of readers today.

For Bynner, as we have seen, the experience had a vitalizing effect, as his August 1918 letter to *Poetry* (in which he proclaimed that his Spectrist self had become “liberated”) demonstrates. He continued to write as Emanuel Morgan, immediately after Spectrism and even later in his career.¹⁰ The declaration of Morgan as “a liberated identity” (1918, 287) has a number of ramifications. It suggests that Bynner, despite his own lingering traditionalist reputation, saw beyond the hoax aspects of *Spectra*; it also signals (and indeed Bynner specifically advertised in the same letter) that Morgan’s work would remain a significant part of his oeuvre. Two immediately subsequent collections, *The Beloved Stranger* (1919) and *Pins*

Witter Bynner, Arthur Davison Ficke, and the *Spectra* Poems

for *Wings* (1920), would be composed by Bynner as Emanuel Morgan (with the latter book actually being published under the Morgan name). With the recently ended Great War clearly in mind, William Marion Reedy wrote of the personages inhabiting *The Beloved Stranger* that they are “like figures half awakened into life from dim tapestries erstwhile seen in since violated Belgium, who play their parts in the opalescent smoky dream dramas of [Flemish Symbolist playwright] Maeterlinck” (1919, xix). Yet, as Bynner/Morgan offers in a poem from that book titled “Crystal,” “Between your laughter and mine / Lies the shadow of the sword of change” (Bynner 1919, 29). In a way, these lines sum up the whole Spectrist project, certainly accompanied by much laughter alongside its poems of war and wonder. And, at least one Spectrist, Bynner, emerged from the period a much-changed poet indeed.

§

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Notes

1. In a footnote in Bynner's *Selected Letters*, James Kraft describes Bynner's rude (and sexist) treatment of Lowell: “WB did not like Amy Lowell . . . and abused her and her poetry with his humor. . . . He mocked her as a ‘Hippopoetess.’ He also ridiculed her poem ‘Bath’ and ruined its delicate brilliance for many by suggesting the image of a naked Lowell in a bathtub” (Bynner 1981, 48).

2. In this regard, Churchill also reproduces the misperception that Spectrism's aim was to attack *vers libre* and that Bynner's “own real motive . . . was to discredit the free verse movement” (2007, 190). Responding to similarly misplaced criticism in 1918, Bynner in his letter to *Poetry* points out, with reference to the *Spectra* preface itself (which treats formal and free verse on an equal footing), that this was simply never the case (Morgan 1918, 286–87). For Ficke's part, while it is true that he argued in favor of rhythm and meter in a 1915 *Dial* article (see 1915b), he quickly clarified in another, more in-depth essay that *vers libre* “has been used admirably” and that “there is no sense whatever in the popular objections that have been raised to the free verse of the modern poet,” going on to assert that “it is only with those who proclaim free verse to be the sole possible poetic medium that one has a right to quarrel” (1916, 440).

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3. See also Frances Dickey's *The Modern Portrait Poem: From Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ezra Pound* (2012), which devotes significant space to analyzing the work of Ficke (as himself), along with all three Spectrist poets (as Spectrists).
4. Morgan and Knish titled the poems in *Spectra* by nonsequentially numbered "Opera" ("Opus 88," "Opus 47," "Opus 122," etc.), suggesting their project's broad scale and musical qualities. It would be tempting to see this as a satire of Pound's "Cantos," but the first of the latter did not appear until 1917, a year after the *Spectra* anthology had been published.
5. See Kraft 1995, 19–20. Putzel claims that "At Harvard [Bynner and Ficke] had been drawn together partly by a common dislike of Wallace Stevens" ([1963] 1998, 228–29), but Kraft gives a more nuanced view of Bynner and Stevens as "two Harvard friends and poets, rivals who went separate ways in literature" (1995, 19) but who maintained a relationship. Upon the publication of Stevens's poem "Sunday Morning" (in *Poetry* in November 1915), Ficke wrote to Harriet Monroe that "perhaps it's the most beautiful poem ever written" (quoted in Smith 1961, 67).
6. To muddy the waters, Bynner, in a letter to Ficke dated March 25, 1916, also suggested mentioning Lowell in their preface, though in less flattering terms, proposing the following language: "If Miss Amy Lowell were as able a poet as she is a critic she might be a Spectrist. . . . In fact some of us fail to see that she is an Imagist at all" (Bynner 1981, 48).
7. Since Pittsburgh is where the Spectrists were meant to be located, the Fifth Avenue mentioned here is the one in Pittsburgh (one of that city's major arteries)—rather than the Fifth Avenue in New York.
8. See Browne 1956, 142–43. Unlike most of the British soldier-poets whose reputations emerged posthumously, Brooke achieved transatlantic fame while still living, with his group of war sonnets "1914" appearing in early 1915 (three of which were published in the United States in *Poetry*, April 1915). Ficke's other poem to Brooke, "Rupert Brooke (A Memory)," appeared in *The Little Review* in June–July 1915.
9. Putzel, in a note on Ficke's papers, informs us that "Ficke's tragic war sonnet, 'These are the thunders,' is dated March 5, 1916, right after Bynner's departure" ([1963] 1998, 335), the two having just completed work on the initial *Spectra* poems. Upon reverting to his "true" poetic self, then, Ficke immediately turned his attention back to the war; clearly it had become something of a preoccupation for him, before and throughout the *Spectra* period.
10. Marjorie Allen Seiffert similarly continued to write and publish as Elijah Hay even after Spectrism had been revealed (see Russek 2009).

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Reviews

The Homoerotics of Orientalism, by Joseph Allen Boone. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. 486 pages.

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Many editions of Edward W. Said's classic study *Orientalism* (1978) feature on the cover a detail from a captivating oil painting by French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme.¹ Entitled *The Snake Charmer*, this striking work, which dates from around 1879–1880, has become almost synonymous with Said's revered inquiry into "the way cultural dominance . . . operated" when Western culture turned its attention—as it did so frequently in the nineteenth century—to the Middle East (1994, 28).² More recently, Gérôme's *Snake Charmer* generated further interest when it was a centerpiece in the magnificent exhibition of his art that was shown at the J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles), the Musée d'Orsay (Paris), and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid) in 2010–11. The exquisite catalog accompanying this event contains an informative entry by Dominique de Font-Réaulx, who remarks that when Gérôme and his contemporaries (such as Charles Landelle and Martial Thabard) represented snake charmers, they were focusing on a figure that was likely to "instill fascination, terror, delight, and dread in anyone who looked at him" (2010, 278). The painting, as several art historians have remarked, adopts its architectural features from various periods and locations during the French painter's extensive travels in the Turkish, Arab, and Persian world, just as it reveals his acquaintance with photographic prints of these different settings. Gérôme presents a young nude boy charming a large snake (the species is unclear) in a room that draws on details he had copied when visiting the Golden Passage of the harem in the Topkapı Palace, Istanbul. Gérôme, however, carefully magnified the scale of the beautiful wall tiling, and in doing so enhanced the grandeur of the decorative turquoise-hued backdrop to the scene. In this imposing environment, in which calligraphy adapted from the Koran adorns the upper parts of the back wall, ten men of different ages and different ethnicities (including a chieftain in the middle) are sitting down, in a fairly

close-knit group, with their backs to the lustrous tiling. Meanwhile, the floor—as Sarah Lees (2012) observes—has a pattern that is most probably taken from the Mosque of ibn Amr-al-As, Cairo (the stonework looks similar to that in Gérôme's *Prayer in the Mosque* [1871]). Some of the men have their weapons propped upright, while a cross-legged older male is piping on a flute in the right-hand part of the canvas, with his instrument pointing toward the boy.

Gérôme's thoughtful arrangement ensures that we focus on the central figure. With his back turned to us, the slender boy stands upright on a rug, holding aloft the head of a muscular reptile whose lithe body coils twice around his torso. The fact that the creature clothes the child's chest and back means that the viewer's gaze lingers on the figure's slim legs that lead up to his bare buttocks. At the same time, it is clear that the assembled men cannot avert their collective gaze from the accomplished performer. As Font-Réaulx reminds us, in 1983 Linda Nochlin—in her reflections on Gérôme's Orientalism—commented: “The defining mood of the painting is mystery” (Nochlin 1989, 35). In her astute analysis, Nochlin observes: “We are permitted only a beguiling rear view of the boy holding the snake. . . . A frontal view, which would reveal unambiguously both his sex and the fullness of his dangerous performance, is denied us.” It therefore follows that viewers remain “haunted by certain *absences* in the painting”: phenomena that are not seen directly but instead vicariously through the eyes of the sundry Middle Eastern men transfixed by the child's finely choreographed routine.

To Joseph Allen Boone, in his voluminous *Homoerotics of Orientalism*, Gérôme's famous *Snake Charmer* is a crucial point of reference, for several related reasons. He first mentions this painting, which creates a mélange of Turkish and Egyptian styles, in his second chapter, “Beautiful Boys, Sodomy, and *Hamams*,” where he (like Nochlin) notes, “The compositional sightlines direct the viewer's eyes to the boy's buttocks” (54). He remarks on the manner in which the men “feast their eyes on the naked beauty of a prepubescent street performer, while a suggestively phallic snake rises from his arms.” On this basis, the artwork confirms Boone's guiding thesis that “the appeal and aura of illicitness” that radiates from the painting “is rooted, however subliminally, in Western associations of Middle Eastern sensuality with male pederasty.” Yet Boone, who reserves a more detailed discussion of Gérôme's masterpiece for his seventh chapter, has a further point to make about *The Snake Charmer*. Even though the image has

graced the cover of Said's *Orientalism*, Boone contends, the painting belongs to a canon of homoerotic works to which Said disappointingly gives "short shrift." More troubling for him is the apparent sidelining of what Said briefly acknowledges in *Orientalism* as "an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex" (1994, 188). From Boone's perspective, there is some dissatisfaction in the way that Said refuses to dwell on the manner in which the Orient suggests even to this day (to quote *Orientalism*) "not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sexuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies" (quoted in 54). More to the point, he claims that Said talks "euphemistically" (54) about "different type[s] of sexuality" (Said 1994, 188), ones that we might imagine—on Boone's account—that Said perhaps found unnecessary to specify.³ Yet when we look at the broader context of Said's remark, we see that he states that for several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western writers—including Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval, Joseph Conrad, and André Gide—"the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" (190). This "different type of sexuality," Said says, was "perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden" than that permitted in Europe. Still, as Said readily admits, this area of study "is not the province [of his] analysis . . . alas, despite its frequently noted appearance" (188). As readers of *Orientalism* know, Said's main interest lies in Western writers such as Silvestre de Sacy, Edward William Lane, and—arguably more than any other commentator—Ernest Renan, all of whom were respected scholars of Middle Eastern languages and cultures. In his "Introduction," Said is clear about what he has and has not been able to address throughout his substantial volume, especially his exclusion of research on Biblical scholarship and its relationship with what he calls "the rise of modern Orientalism" (18). As far as I can see, the fact that Said had to turn away from the "different type of sexuality"—a generalized type that diverged from Western erotic norms—sounds more a note of lament than evasiveness.

Boone, however, takes Said's assumed exclusionary posture as grounds for inquiring not into a generic "different type of sexuality" but rather into a specifically male homoerotic one. In turning his attention to an astonishing array of primary sources, which range from pre-Islamic *ghazals* to posters for Egyptian-themed gay parties in 1990s Palm Springs, he has a further methodological problem to settle with Said. Boone draws attention to the concerted critiques that recent postcolonial critics have

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made of *Orientalism*. "The gist of these vociferous disagreements," Boone suggests, touches on "three aspects of the book":

First, the exasperation among the contemporary heirs of the scholarly discipline of Orientalism (which originated among philologists and linguists) at Said's sometimes free and easy use of his sources in order to paint the blackest picture possible of Orientalist scholarship over the past 350 years, damning some scholars unjustly and oddly ignoring others, to create a Manichean view of West versus East; second, the anachronistic projection of imperial and colonial ambitions backwards in time to irrelevant historical periods; and, third, an overreliance on Foucauldian conceptions of knowledge and power that assume in advance what needs to be proved. (24)

Yet, as Boone concedes, even if these stringent assessments (ones that he does not name in the main text but references in an endnote) have "some merit,"⁴ he is ready to accept that Said's "emphasis on the psychological dimensions of Orientalism" has nonetheless proved "particularly helpful" to him, notably in the stress that the 1978 study places on "the representation of the East as stage, spectacle, and 'tableau vivant' on which Europe acts out its psychic dramas" (24–25). This aspect of *Orientalism* has paved the way for Boone, regardless of his misgivings about Said's inattention to sexuality, to consider "those elements of projection fantasy, fetishism, and voyeurism that repeatedly mark the erotic trajectories of the texts examined in" *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (25).

In any case, there are other sides to Said's influential scholarship that Boone wishes to recover in the name of producing an inquiry into patterns of male same-sex desire within Orientalism that does not replicate the at times unbending belief in a "monolithic 'Orient,' one that in its vast singularity is all the more easily dominated by an equally monolithic 'Occident' whose all-seeing, all-knowing discursive mastery come[s] to seem universal and irreversible." In order to avoid this pitfall, Boone readily acknowledges the advances made in Said's later major work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in which we read about the significance of a "comparative or, better, a contrapuntal perspective" (32) for scholars who address Western imperialism. Such a method assists us in seeing (in Said's phrasing) "a connection between coronation rituals in England and the Indian durbars of the late nineteenth century." Boone

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compares this contrapuntal approach to that of other scholars (such as Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli [2014], Sahar Amer [2008], and Nabil Matar [1999]), whose research has produced “dazzling results” that call “into question the self-defeating logic that has traditionally posited East and West, hetero- and homosexuality, premodern and modern, as mutually exclusive terms” (xxiii). It is in this spirit that Boone turns to the enduring legacy of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose writings are especially attuned to the shortcomings of entrenched forms of dualistic thought. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick proposes that the time has come for cultural critics to engage in styles of reading that overcome the paranoid “hermeneutics of suspicion,” an interpretive mode that pledges its faith in “unveiling the hidden historical violences” (2003, 139) of some grotesque dominant entity, when it is the case that many forms of such violence enjoy considerable “visibility” (140) that in itself “constitutes much of the violence.” In its place, Sedgwick suggests an alternative model of “reparative reading” (123): an approach that enables us to see “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of culture—even of culture whose avowed desire had often been not to sustain them” (150–51). Attentive to this insight, Boone aims to adopt “more flexible ways of analyzing the traces of desires past and present, echoing across spaces and traversing populations, cultures and subcultures, disciplinary fields, and individuals” (xxxii). He wishes to foster what his colleague David Román has called “an ethos of critical generosity” (xxxii) in which reparative inclusivity outmaneuvers paranoid oppositionality.

If we bear these considerations in mind, it is worth returning to Boone’s analysis of *The Snake Charmer*, to which he adverts once again in chapter 7, “Homoeroticism in Miniaturist Painting and Orientalist Art.” Like every other part of *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, this one upholds the principle of tracing the “contrapuntal resonances” that we see through the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western sources. Here several of Boone’s examples are taken from homoerotic Middle Eastern miniaturist art from the time of the Safavid Empire and French Orientalist painting produced at the height of European colonization (305). The chapter begins with discussions of the male homoerotic iconography that we find in collections that Orientalists brought back from their travels in the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Especially resonant here is an archive of fifty-seven folios of miniaturist Persian art that the late Victorian

English archaeologist and curator Sir Charles Hercules Read acquired and later sold to J. Pierpont Morgan. The images, which originate in the early seventeenth century, constitute “a hand-picked collection overwhelmingly comprised of images of beautiful youths, which raises the question of whether this thematic played a role in their original assembly, their purchase by Read, and the additions that Read made to the collection” (317). Although he remains unable to answer these inquiries, Boone’s observant descriptions of the images draw our attention to such instructive matters as the “desirous type” evident in the “Persian youth dressed in the latest *European* fashion” (319). This painting compares with another, from the same collection, in which a “Persian beau in Western dress resembles, both in posture and attitude, Mu‘īn Muṣavvīr’s depiction of a European youth holding an Iranian pot.” The upshot of this section of chapter 7 is that “the tradition of the Islamic miniature is suffused with a sensuality that is both explicitly and implicitly homoerotic” (335), just as it shows us, too, that European styles—perhaps contrapuntally—inform Persian iconography of this period.

At this juncture, Boone’s chapter switches from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and, correspondingly, from Iran to France. Once he has claimed that “no systematic study has yet been made of the male homoerotic elements in European artistic representations of the Middle East” (336), he returns to *The Snake Charmer*, and it is here that we might assess more completely the protocols of the contrapuntal and reparative mode of reading that inspire his approach. In his view, everything about the painting—“from the upright rifles leaning against the wall to the tumescent snake”—contributes to a narrative that is “subliminally one of masculinity, prowess, and phallic potency.” “Moreover,” Boone states, “this fantasy is routed through a homoerotically constructed gaze” (342). Especially arresting, he contends, is the way the “sightlines irrevocably draw the viewer’s gaze to the buttocks of the youth,” together with the manner in which “the intense gazes of the group of male spectators,” guided by the rug on which the child stands and the position of the flute, “converge on the boy’s unseen penis.” This highly directed sightline, Boone states, ensures the collapse of the distance between the intrigued Western viewer and the Eastern male figures’ consumption of the snake charmer’s prepubescent privates: “Just as the [male spectators’] eyes are predatorily directed to the boy’s genitals, our eyes are directed toward the boy’s buttocks” (343). As a result, “the two gazes ‘create’ the totality of

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the thus entirely eroticized body of the snake charmer.” For this reason, “‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ viewers, rather than existing as opposites, become mirrors of each other, linked in a shared act of homoerotic triangulation.” At this point, Boone’s discussion of *The Snake Charmer* comes to an end, no doubt because his analysis has culminated in a moment of contrapuntal and reparative reading, one in which we find a shared homoerotic desire converging on Gérôme’s naked child.

There are, however, additional questions about the highly fabricated nature of *The Snake Charmer* that are surely worth considering in relation to the origins of Gérôme’s concoction of wall tiles, stonework, calligraphy, ethnicities, clothing, and weapons, as well as the musical instrument. Perhaps the most pressing inquiry is why this heavily constructed arrangement of props and this relay of looks surrounds a young nude body. Is it just that the painting’s solicitation of a pederastic gaze—one organized within an imaginary Middle Eastern setting—pulls the implied Western viewer’s line of sight toward a tabooed erotic vector? And, if we agree with some or all of Boone’s conclusions, we might wonder what should be made of the potential violence involved when a Western viewer, whose gaze may well focus on the boy’s backside, experiences a contrapuntal back-and-forth with the apparently predatory looks of the assembled Eastern males? What, in other words, has happened through this shared homoeroticism to the nude child? And what, one might venture, is reparative about it? I think these uncertainties are worth pursuing momentarily because none of the literature that I have read on *The Snake Charmer* explains why the boy is undressed. What could be the context for the child’s nakedness? The answer, as I discovered in one source, possibly lies in the idea that the Psylli (a North African snake-charming sect) believed that the scent of a child’s body would anesthetize the poisonous creatures (see Murphy 2010, 8). At any rate, there is probably some room here for contemplating why an unclothed boy should maintain such authority over the seemingly phallic snake that looks as if it could, at any moment, constrict him to death. As far as I can tell, the males in the background are not feasting solely on the sight of the boy’s genitals; they are also watching the child laborer spellbindingly exert power over a creature much stronger than himself.

The explanatory force of context, to be sure, can be overrated when we try to produce informed analyses of cultural works. In *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* Boone’s tendency is to concentrate mostly (though not

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exclusively) on formal features. This is the case, just to take one example, with the occultist Aleister Crowley's *Bagh-Muattar; or The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (1910). This "faux-Persian poem sequence" is a "pornographic *jeu d'esprit*" (279) from a writer whose previous collections of poetry include *White Stains* (1898), whose title alone alerts us to Crowley's preoccupations with male ejaculation. This work translates his reading of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's sexological classic, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886, revised through 1903), into lyrical form. Crowley, one of the most perverse heirs of 1890s Decadence, came of age not long after Oscar Wilde was sent to jail; once he had become involved with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, he was ripe for the discovery he made in Egypt in 1904, when Horus appeared to him, dictated the *Books of the Law*, and enabled him to found the religion of Thelema. Boone, who reminds us of some of these developments in Crowley's unique career, also points out that *The Scented Garden*—which contains, one must confess, some not terribly engaging verses—appeared (as did so many works of clandestine erotica) in a limited edition of two hundred copies, on this occasion through the London Orientalist Probsthain and Company: a publisher whose titles Boone does not elaborate on.⁵ HM Customs, we learn, seized the volume in 1924 and two years later destroyed practically every copy. As Boone observes, this sequence of English-language *ghazals* focuses on the sexual potency of El Qahar (the Conqueror) and his tireless desire for the fifteen-year-old Habib, and the poems masquerade as a translation from the hands of the "Late Major Luty and Another" (*lūti*, Boone notes, is Arabic for the active partner in pederasty [281]): "Thy podex, like a rose, within / Thy buttocks, sprays of Jessamine, / Buds to my kisses; then the wine / Sets this old head of mine a-spin" (Crowley quoted in Boone 284). This extract certainly shows that Crowley did not have the craft of Edward Fitzgerald, whose elegant *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859, revised through 1889) did arguably more than any other work to direct the influence of Orientalism on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English poetry. Fitzgerald's loose adaptation, however, receives only a glancing reference in Boone's book (see 287). Instead, he produces a sustained analysis of the crude sexual jokes that Crowley makes in *The Scented Garden*, not least at the conclusion of the volume where the virile pederast surprisingly "reveals that he is ready for Habib to slip *his* boyishly sized 'almond member ... in the podex of thine El Qahar'" (quoted in Boone, 285). "The 'end' (of

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the entire volume)," Boone quips, "is the 'end' (the poet's *derrière*)" (286). He obviously finds much to treasure in this "odd gem of an eccentrically modernist, punning and playful, obscenely exuberant text."

In many ways, *The Scented Garden* may well appear to be an "odd gem," though it clearly also has connections with much better-known works, which include not only Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát* but also Richard Burton's "Terminal Essay" in his ten-volume English translation of *The Arabian Nights* (Burton's title was *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night* [1886]). (Boone notes in passing that Major Lutiy divulges his "very handy" knowledge of Burton's work.) In his "Terminal Essay," Burton theorizes a geo-erotic zone in which pederasty is endemic. Besides encompassing the prehistoric Americas, this realm for Burton embraces the Mediterranean basin, much of the Middle East, parts of Indo-China, and the South Sea Islands. While I appreciate that Burton's "Terminal Essay" probably had limited purposes for Boone's study, it nevertheless remains a touchstone in the field, just as the queer writer Fitzgerald's introduction of the *rubā'ī* influenced the form of such poems as Algernon Charles Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" (1866), whose scandalous hetero-eroticism and pulsating prosody left a powerful legacy to fin-de-siècle Decadence.

In the extraordinary historical and cultural sweep of his magnum opus, however, Boone's preference is to attend mainly to less familiar works, particularly ones—such as Gide's *Carnets d'Égypte* (1939)—that have not been previously translated into English. In addressing this wealth of materials, Boone remains at all times generous in attending to their stylistic properties, in retelling details from their plots, and in summarizing their overall structure. He is also careful to place, where necessary, his sources within identifiable cultural traditions. This is true, for instance, of his attentive discussion of the online photo-stream of the artists known jointly as "CharlesFred" (Charles Roffey and his partner Fred), whose work "contains hundreds of images of handsome young men from across the Middle East and North Africa" (392). Boone's main point, in his analysis of Roffey's photography, is that in a print such as *Syria—Young Beauty at the Ummayyid Mosque* (2005), we are not necessarily encountering the objectifying gaze of a stereotypical sexual tourist who is aware of the history of such early practitioners of homoerotic photography such as Wilhelm von Gloeden. Instead, "most of Roffey's subjects seem to take genuine pleasure in being admired" (394). This is an

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observation, I think, that creates the opportunity for the Western viewer to see Syrian men in politicized aesthetic terms at the present time, when their nation has been laid to waste through war and their compatriots characterized as potential terrorists in several parts of Europe and America.

In the end, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* emerges as a bountiful book—one on which Columbia University Press has spared no expense with the illustrations and fine color plates—which sets before us a marvelous trove of literary and visual sources that interweave Western and Eastern representations of male same-sex desire. The materials are clearly overwhelming, as Boone intimates on the final page, too abundant for an overarching argument or thesis to emerge from them. Instead, he bids us farewell by noting that in the broad “arc of coverage” running through his final three chapters, which often assemble very recent materials, we find “an inestimable number of half-completed stories whose large strokes as well as tiny details . . . contribute to a narrative whose ghostly traces shape and reshape themselves in present-day conflicts, conundrums, and surprising alliances” (422). In this respect, Boone has opened the door for a fresh generation of scholars so that they can discover, for the first time, sources they would most probably not otherwise have found. Moreover, his study prompts further reassessment of such famous paintings as *The Snake Charmer*, whose full frame of reference still remains, I fear, a little out of scholarly reach.

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Notes

1. Not all editions of Said's *Orientalism* feature Gérôme's painting on the cover. Daniel Varisco observes that the 2003 Penguin Books (UK) edition presents "a meticulously detailed Orientalist scene by the French artist Emile Jean-Horace Vernet": "A dark-skinned Bedouin man in robes bends close to stare lustfully at a white-skinned beauty, a half-inclined odalisque coquette on a rock, with her left thigh and right breast exposed to the light through the opening folds of [her] alluring white dress" (2017, 27). As Varisco's idiom suggests, this image is an explicitly heteroerotic one. The decision to market Said's book with this image on the cover raises further questions about the assumption that Orientalism is fundamentally linked with structures of sexualization.
2. All of my quotations from Said's *Orientalism* are taken from the 1994 edition, which provides a critical introduction to the original 1978 publication; the second edition retains the Arabic number pagination of its predecessor.
3. Boone's endnote indicates that Said makes this observation in *Orientalism*, 188, but the quotation appears on 190 (see Boone, 435).
4. Boone notes three studies that have produced sustained critiques of Said's *Orientalism*: Irwin 2006, Varisco 2007, and Warraq 2007. Boone misspells Warraq's name as Warroq (428–29).
5. Arthur Probsthain was a noted London publisher of Orientalist studies in the early twentieth century. His lists included the complete English translation of Nazami Ganjavi's erotic romantic epic, *The Seven Beauties* (1197). Probsthain's bookstore is still in business at 41 Great Russell Street, London.

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Forget English! Orientalism and World Literatures, by Aamir R. Mufti. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. 304 pages.

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“World literature is Orientalism, it is inseparable from it,” remarked Aamir R. Mufti in an interview in 2016. It is a provocative claim: after all, wasn’t world literature supposed to overcome Orientalism, triumphantly declaring a united literature of the world? In *Forget English! Orientalism and World Literatures*, Mufti demonstrates how “a genealogy of world literature leads to Orientalism” and that this is “a fact that the contemporary discussion appears by its very nature to be incapable of recognizing” (19). In order to analyze this “mutual entanglement of Orientalism and world literature” (30), Mufti revisits Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). This book had long ago entered the English studies curriculum, and its main idea had been widely discussed, critically processed, and transformed to better suit the needs of contemporary postcolonial studies and world literature. Yet Mufti suggests that it “remains still a strangely misunderstood and underexplored book” (28) and that criticism leveled at it is too often limited to pointing out false representations, thereby overlooking the Oriental space itself and how it was constructed. Attention to Orientalist processes is, in Mufti’s view, crucial for world literature: the discipline sees itself as distant from colonialism and capitalism, but just as it is blind to its own complicity with neoliberal globalism, it suppresses the conditions of its own grounding in Orientalist thinking.

One of the main criticisms of *Orientalism* is that Said did not take into account contributions by German scholars in the construction of the Oriental other. Mufti compensates for this omission. Moreover, while Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* is the point of departure for many world literature scholars, Mufti shows how the genealogy of world literature needs to stretch further back historically. In accordance with Said’s project, Mufti demonstrates that colonialism does not happen *outside* the world literary space; rather, colonial processes and Orientalist thinking helped to create the notion of what the world literary space is. Moreover, since the ideas of “world” and “nation” reinforce each other (77), world literature can therefore never overcome the concept of the nation (Mufti omits transnational concepts that are often able to make up for the deficits

of both world and national perspectives). The world is not borderless: the ability to cross borders, for both people and texts, in some cases still depends on nationality, class, race, or gender.

Nor does everyone in the world speak the same language, though Mufti draws attention to the global dominance of English and its role in Orientalist thought. His imperative "Forget English!" actually means the opposite. The role English plays in world literature is often overlooked and thus becomes a "*vanishing mediator*" (16). Its dominance is hidden in the very practice and theory of world literature: as Mufti puts it, "The history of world literature is inseparable from the rise of English as global literary vernacular and it is in fact to the same extent *predicated* on the latter" (11). English is the last thing we should forget if we're going to engage with this subject. Mufti joins Said in the call for a historical understanding of language, and he draws attention to institutions and disciplines that shaped it.

The narrative of the books starts with Enlightenment ideas about language and the early Romantic period. Mufti follows the to-and-fro between colonial spaces and European thinkers: philosophical historicism was shaped by the newly available bodies of writing from the Orient, and these were in turn interpreted through newly formed ideas of cultural difference. William Jones, who "discovered" Sanskrit, understood highly stylized poetic forms such as the ghazal (centered on love and loss of love) in the Herderian sense of authentic expression of spirit. Oriental writings, as presented by Jones and other scholars, influenced European literature (the presence of the Oriental had a profound impact on the shaping of Romantic consciousness, literary forms, and national desires); but they were also the reason why Oriental literature, and its character, seemed limited, primitive, and monothematic: "'Lyric' sensibility emerged in Europe at the threshold of modernity in the encounter with 'Oriental' verse and, having taken over the universe of poetic expression in the West, became a benchmark and a test for 'Oriental' writing traditions themselves, erasing in the process all memory of its intercultural origins" (74).

In Mufti's analysis, Orientalism supported intellectual developments of the last three centuries. He engages with various thinkers and links them to writers, most notably Marx, for whom, on this reading, Orientalism becomes "the cultural logic of the bourgeois transformation of societies on a world scale" (90). This transformation also includes national consciousness: Mufti points out that the current discussions often ignore or downplay these links and the role literature plays in

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establishing hierarchies between societies: “For any attempt at a critical understanding of our present moment, the larger task is to comprehend the precise nature of this extended literary-philological moment, in which often-overlapping bodies of writing came to acquire, through a process of historicization, distinct personalities as ‘literature’ along national lines” (97). The creation of Indian national literature was inherently connected with the formation of the new national intelligentsia, as Mufti persuasively argues. European scholars, mostly British, French, and German, discovered the writings of the Orient. They brought the materials to their own museums and universities (where they, in large numbers, remain to this day), and they schooled experts of Oriental languages and literatures whom they sent to India to educate English civil servants and later colonial pupils who, as Mufti shows, would be taught the Orientalized version of their own cultures and languages. These pupils, who were the children of the upper- and middle-class national elite, would later become the leaders of anticolonial movements. The nation they fought for was largely a construction of their colonizers, “formed through the destruction of varied and sometimes ancient cultures of reading, writing, and performing” (98).

One of the examples of Orientalist cultural logic and its *embeddedness* in both discourse and practice is the creation of Indian culture as pure and underived. European scholars established hierarchies of texts and languages, such as the attempt to create an Indian vernacular by purifying Hindi of foreign elements (mostly Arabic and Persian) while ignoring how the alleged contamination resulted from natural, historical, and cultural development. They also produced models for standardized Indian prose. Mufti describes this process as “the indigenization of language, literature, and culture” (118), in which the Indo-Persian element was treated as something extraneous to Indian cultural heritage, and points out that it bore bitter fruit during the partition of India. In his examination of the Indian and Pakistani Anglophone novel, Mufti challenges the idea, put forward by Pascale Casanova, who sees the novel as the benchmark of literary modernity. In Mufti’s view, this is a prime example of how other national literatures are judged through the European cultural system. He therefore turns to poetry that, in contrast, is only rarely seen in the context of world literature (as Jahan Ramazani had previously pointed out). Mufti presents the example of Agha Shahid Ali to show how one can creatively engage with English and the traditional ghazal form. A powerful example is Ali’s poem “Beyond English,” that Mufti quotes as an example

of “making the achievements of one language available to the possibility of writing in another” (202).

In the last chapter, Erich Auerbach serves as an example of exilic consciousness that enables a new perspective not by drawing nearer to the other but by moving away from the self, Mufti rereads Auerbach’s *Mimesis* (1946) and “Philology and *Weltliteratur*” (1952) as the harvest of Auerbach’s exile in Turkey and shows how his criticism of world literature entails the question of how difference (ethnic, national, continental, cultural, or national) is established. Mufti believes that contemporary criticism needs to recognize difference and the role it plays in the contemporary field of world literature. The focus of his critique, the failure to recognize difference, has been voiced before: the theoretical insufficiency of the concept, the Eurocentric definition of both world and literature, the impossibility of ever entirely escaping the national literary space, the Anglocentric scope of so much literary production. Historical perspective is the main strength of *Forget English!* and represents its major contribution to scholarship in world literature, postcolonial studies, comparative literature, as well as area studies and history. Furthermore, the scope of his research is admirable: he navigates freely among historical discourse, analytical methods, and close reading. The passages in which he analyzes Shahid’s poems are among his most persuasive.

One question I have about Mufti’s argument is the role of India. He sees it as a “prototypical case” (31). By so doing, he makes the mistake he warns against: both India and English are taken as the standard universal. They become what Paris is for Casanova: a reference point but also a blind spot. On the other hand, Mufti avoids Casanova’s blindness toward what Rossen Djagalov calls “the world republic of leftist letters” (2009, 41). By proclaiming Paris the literary *caput regni*, Casanova ignores the fact that, for the majority of the twentieth century, there was another, competing literary space. Mufti does not examine this space further, but he at least acknowledges its existence and admits that its dynamics are different.

Mufti also never elaborates on the concept of exile, while at the same time presenting it as one of the few possibilities (perhaps the only one) that enable a more radical critical practice. He seems to suggest that a truly global perspective can be achieved only by displacement from the native culture. One cannot help but think of Emily Apter’s judgment on world literature as a “cosmopolitan project better suited to privileged émigrés” (2013, 177), a group to which Said and Mufti belong. Mufti was born and raised in Karachi, studied in London and New York, and now

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teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles. How does his own position contribute to his views? Mufti's scrupulous text and his austere style do not convey any personal information, but since exile as a critical practice is one of the book's underlying concepts, the reader cannot help but wonder.

Mufti convincingly shows how English worked in India, especially in the educational system. His book, however, prompts other questions concerning English: why and how did it become the mediator between countries never colonized by Great Britain? What made English so successful in comparison to languages that, too, had claims to global dominance? These are only mentioned in brackets: did French and Dutch in Africa work along similar lines? Some of the mechanisms Mufti mentions are also valid for political formations that were not colonizers, for example the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The attention Mufti draws to the role and specific practices of English will not only resonate with scholars of world literature but will contribute to and inspire further sociolinguistic analyses of English as the language of global capitalism and of its problematic relation to power.

Mufti has written an important book that will no doubt shape the future of world literature scholarship and theory, bringing it closer to postcolonial studies. His rereading of Said demonstrates the continuing relevance of *Orientalism* forty years after it was published: Orientalist thought is still present in the ways we write, read, and analyze literature. Mufti calls for "a radically historical understanding of language and the forms of its institution in literature, culture, and society"—"*philology after Orientalism*" (250)—which for him is one of the most pressing tasks for humanities nowadays, although, he admits, it poses unprecedented challenges on an institutional level. By investigating the ways English colonized "world literature," *Forget English* is an example of such historical understanding and thus paves the way for a more radical and self-reflective critical practice in this field.

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The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature, by C  il  n Parsons. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 247 pages.

Nels Pearson

In light of the geocritical turn in humanities scholarship over the last decade or so, an extensive study of the impact of the Irish Ordnance Survey on modern Irish writing is a timely addition to Irish studies and modernist studies alike. This is especially the case for one as innovative and well-researched as C  il  n Parsons's *The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature*. The British Board of Ordnance's survey, a project to map all of Ireland that also involved the archiving of local oral histories, receives relatively frequent scholarly attention, typically as an example of British imperial hegemony and surveillance. As Parsons demonstrates, however, there was much more to it than that. Insofar as modernity is a disorienting and rapid social transformation that puts past and present, local and global, into a fraught dialectical relationship, the survey not only records but also enacts a form of modernity. The project was conducted between 1824 and 1842, on the eve of the mass migrations of the famine era and during the decline of the Irish language and the modernization of economies that marked the relatively new union of Great Britain and Ireland. An irony is therefore embedded in the survey, for its enlightenment aspirations to encyclopedic knowledge and comprehensive representation of space are undercut by the fact that the "places" it sought to record and document were being eclipsed in the same historical moment. This irony sets in motion a "dialectic of preservation and destruction" (20) that in turn engenders a climate of self-reflexive fixation on questions of place, nation, and memory.

If inadvertently, the survey also therefore fueled the imagination of cultural nationalism, insofar as the former's massive effort to record "the national at the local level" spurred interest in looking to oral histories, nomenclature, buildings, and ruins as sources not just of local but also of "Irish" authenticity and identity. Indeed, the abstraction of space required by capitalism and modernity is a feature of nationalism, at least in that it desires native artifacts that can be made to signify a cultural-geographic and historical totality. In many ways, argues Parsons, the "archive fever" of the survey era is a progenitor—perverse as it may be—of turn-of-the-

century Celtic revivalism. Hence the survey's unprecedented effort to imagine the "nation" as a spatial totality, but in local scales, was not simply an instrument of state power but also a nuanced and contradictory affair in which an "indifferent imperial gaze sits side by side with a sensibility that seeks out and respects indigenous forms of knowledge, Irish history, the Irish language, and the built heritage" (69).

Moreover, and more importantly for Parsons, the contradictory nature of the survey—and the shifting scalar identifications with local, national, and global orientation that it galvanized—exemplifies Irish colonial modernity. Colonial modernity is not primarily urban and industrial, as in the dominant Eurocentric model, but instead involves "radical discontinuities . . . result[ing] from the collision of modernizing forces and an older way of life" (26), including the widening spheres of orientation and problems of scale experienced in an era of mass migration, nationalization, and uneven integration into global capital. During these overlapping nineteenth-century transformations, people who had, for example, tended to think of their cultural, familial, and economic ambit as limited to the Aran Isles and western Ireland found themselves influenced by, or indentifying with, places in North America, the broader Irish "nation," and the various mercantile arcs of the British Empire.

Parsons's aim in locating the origins of Irish modernity in the survey itself, as well as the era of the survey, is not only to offer "an expanded field of modernity," which would now begin earlier and include more rural experiences, but also to propose that the literary and cultural reaction to this spatial and scalar modernity, whose arc reaches from James Clarence Mangan to Samuel Beckett, represents a central component of Irish literary modernism. This is a key point of the book, namely that the archival and cartographic mania of the survey conspired with other displacements of colonial modernity to produce a field "ripe for the development of a self-conscious, self-reflexive attempt to express that modernity: modernism" (27). The argument here has some affinities with Terry Eagleton's claim that Ireland's "ruptured and discontinuous" history and "social and material" landscape (1995, 7–8) were especially conducive to modernism, and could be clarified in relation to Eagleton. Parsons's approach is more spatial and cartographic than Eagleton's, and he argues more explicitly for an expanded period of Irish modernism. He makes the compelling claim that mid-nineteenth-century rural Ireland is illuminated by Ian Baucom's notion of "township modernism," whereby

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“a collectivity’s historical space of experience” becomes overwhelmed by its “horizon of expectation” (2005, 30) as it is mapped into the socioeconomic spheres of modernity and empire.

One might argue that this spatial and scalar modernism is a component of the broader phenomenon rather than its primary feature, but Parsons’s point is well made. A strong current of ironic, reflexive, alienated responses to systems of cartographic and archival knowledge runs throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish writing, beginning with the self-contradictory texts produced by the survey itself (its maps, correspondence, journals), moving to the ambivalent, self-conscious attitude toward memorialization in James Clarence Mangan’s work and the scalar disorientation in John Synge’s genre-bending ethnography, then reaching a zenith in the undoing of systematic spatialized knowledge in the work of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, where the “breakdown of assumed contiguity between the individual and the land” is fully realized (18).

In the opening chapter, Parsons lays the groundwork for his argument by mining the letters of the orthographer and etymologist John O’Donovan, one of the key contributors to the survey, to illustrate “the paradox that is at the center of the survey’s work” (68), namely that even as it enacts imperial and epistemic control, so too does it exemplify the slippage of such controls under the divergent possibilities of local, oral, and folkloric histories. At the center of these contradictions is O’Donovan, whose letters show him vacillating between the scientific objectivity of mapping and the potentially subversive and romantic nature of what he catalogues. When he prioritizes speculative representations of archaic landscape features over present-day uses, or gives equal iconographic representation to Celtic ruins and modern Ascendancy property, the resulting map opens the door to contending historical narratives. A sort of modernist text thus results—one that exemplifies Jacques Derrida’s argument that archives are “always contingent and contradictory” (quoted in Parsons, 80). As Parsons notes, “Archives do not merely affirm or record the capacity of the state to govern—they also capture the fluid relations between governor and governed, between agency and subalternity” (80–81). It is this contingent nature of the survey that keeps it open as an interactive influence—not a closed case but a “movement in a field of force” whose contents remain “active . . . in the shaping and reshaping of Irish cultural history” (81).

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Rather than a broad-ranging discussion of how this dynamic legacy of the survey and its episteme play out in modern Irish literature, Parsons instead offers detailed case studies of how individual writers from different eras engage that legacy. First in chronological sequence is James Clarence Mangan (1803–49), who was half-heartedly employed for a time in the work of the survey. Mangan’s work hardly ever mentions the survey directly, but his polytonal engagement with ruins, landscapes, and the Irish language can be seen as a reaction to the historical over-determination of space that typifies Irish colonial modernity. Insofar as Mangan’s translations willfully and inextricably entangle fact and fiction in the treatment of historical material and structural ruins, they undermine the epistemological, codifying drive of mapping and archival projects while bringing to the surface the inherent contradictions of sanctioned archives. Together with his penchant for idioms of decline and extinction, this refusal to univocally sentimentalize the past or to flesh out historical phantasms results in a “deep ambivalence about the political outcomes of historical investigations” (106) and “repudiat[es] . . . the idea that local knowledge offers privileged access to meaning” (114). Mangan thus emerges as “a fully fledged, self-conscious artistic commentator on the experience of modernity” (86) or, that is, a modernist. Although this relationship between a modernity and its modernism accords with arguments for expanded fields of modernism such as Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Planetary Modernisms* (2015) or Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s *Geomodernisms* (2006), more detailed examples beyond Mangan would be needed to carry the argument that Irish modernism thus commences in the 1840s. However, Parsons is certainly convincing in arguing that “what appears ludic and ephemeral in Mangan’s poetry is a reaction to the politics of commitment and monumentalism that he saw around him” (114) in the era of the survey.

The book moves ahead to the early twentieth century for its next case study, John Synge’s *The Aran Islands* (1906). Parsons argues that although it may have been Synge’s intent to use the western islands as a lamentable symbol of the decline of integrated, premodern societies, his text repeatedly reflects his “troubled engagement with the emerging, or already emerged, modernity of the islands” (143). Synge confronts a people who are aware of and curious about the wider world, who have adapted to “living in two linguistic worlds” (144), and who have lived through waves of emigration to North America that leave them feeling attached to many different places at once. The isles are a place of

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“scale bending” (131), indexing the “multiple and overlapping times that define modernity” (139). In line with Parsons’s opening arguments about colonial modernity, the isles are not defined by their losses to an external modernity but by a state of simultaneity and liminality that is *itself* modern: “Lives being split in two or more pieces, no longer coterminous with themselves, reaching across more than one culture—these are the hallmarks of modernity” (144).

Insofar as this scalar bending disrupts Synge’s own sense of orientation and his text’s central narrative arc, the resulting paratactic text is modernist: “The time of Synge’s narrative is always multiple, always folded in upon itself, always resistant to the linear expectations of modernization and development—it is a time that contains all at once” (140). Parataxis, which assigns no priority to the elements it juxtaposes, “refuses to identify scale” or “to adjudicate on the problem of scale” (149), governs the shift in *The Aran Islands* “from first-person narration to third, from accounts of [his] experiences to interpellated stories, from folk tales to intimate details of daily life, and from the insularity of the islands to their absolute imbrication in the circuits of global capital” (148). Importantly, this modernist “fragmentation and dislocation” in turn reflects that of the survey, which had “attempt[ed] to represent a landscape rapidly emerging into modernity, and grapple with the scalar complexities of this new world” (151). This is a particularly well-crafted argument, and one that will leave a lasting impact on Synge studies.

James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) forms a different kind of connection to the survey, one that was even less direct than what Mangan or Synge imagined; but Parsons’s point in his chapter on Joyce’s text has more to do with reading *Ulysses* in the context of the survey’s legacy of colonial-modernist scalar disruption and flawed spatialized knowledge. The frequent shifts of space, scale, magnitude, and perspective that characterize *Ulysses* are in fact a profound manifestation of a problem that arguably extends back to the survey itself, which is the aim to “represent the social totality while at the same time being challenged and confronted with the impossibility of such a project” (161). Parsons convincingly argues that “Joyce shifts and bends scales in the novel, trying them on and discarding them, to produce an array of scalar perspectives and experiences that seek to capture the experience of the semicolonial city” (155) and its disorienting modernity.

This “experimentation with scale” is most evident in episodes like “Wandering Rocks” and “Ithaca,” that shift frequently not only from one

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perspective to another but from close range to wide scale, inner mind or body to cosmic space. Also significant is the interplay between the well-known cartographic intent of "Wandering Rocks," which Joyce is said to have composed while consulting a map of Dublin, and the less-discussed cartographic errors in the episode, the combined result of which is a near-constant disorientation that runs against the grain of the episode's interest in cartographic assembly and totality. The chapter thus succeeds in "dismantling the idea of the map, stripping it down so that it functions no longer as a representation of space, but only of scale—its reference is not to a represented world, but to a world of representation" (164). Something similar is true of "Ithaca," whose ultrascientific, list-fetishizing interlocutors would seem to promise encyclopedic knowledge and objectivity (as did the survey and its "archive fever" [169]) but whose parodic aims and repeated failures to capture the right scale for depicting human experience ultimately subvert that presumption of totality.

The novel as a whole critiques "three related institutions of the colonial state—map, archive, encyclopedia—each of which makes its presence felt in both the structure and the minutiae of *Ulysses*, in both its large and small registers" (157). In this way, Joyce "bends scales, disrupting and disaggregating, leading his characters and the reader through overlapping scales in an attempt to break down the rigid hierarchies of the urban, the national, and the global" (167). Joyce's text is linked with others in this study as an example of Irish writing's ongoing engagement with the multiple and often contradicting spatial orientations of colonial modernity. However, Joyce's clear intent to "resist and ridicule[e] the comprehensive fantasies that drive the colonial state" (173)—and indeed any Enlightenment ideal of comprehensive epistemology—is in contrast to Synge's work, whose modernism is an indirect register of such modern incongruities.

The study concludes by arguing that physical settings in the work of Samuel Beckett, which vacillate between blankness and detail, abstract and concrete, defamiliarizing and "intimately familiar" (209) topographies, may be read as part of a lineage of troubled attempts to depict comprehensive place and location in Irish writing that stretches back to the Ordnance survey and Mangan. The difference is that Beckett's early Irish fiction takes shape against the backdrop of the 1920s and 1930s, whose totalitarianism, civil war, and narrow nationalisms have dismantled any potential or lingering idealism around "fantasies of comprehensive knowledge" (187). Parsons thus applies what has been said of Beckett regarding many other

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ideological contexts—that his work represents a “radical refusal of any and all systematic attempts at knowledge formation”—to his relation to the survey.

In line with critics such as Sean Kennedy, Patrick Bixby, Emilie Morin, and John Harrington, each of whom have variously interpreted the divisions of late colonial Ireland and the formative Irish state as influences on the dislocation and alienation of Beckett's early “Irish” period, Parsons proposes that rather than an abrupt shift into “placeless topographies” from the French trilogy of the 1940s onward, Beckett has instead always been invested in themes of “simultaneous locatedness and dislocatedness” (187). For Parsons, it is not just that the “landscape of Ireland was always radically alienated for Beckett,” and that this essentially Irish alienation becomes augmented in the mid-century prose and drama, but also that the survey is thus a “powerful, though hidden context” (188) for his oeuvre: “In the struggles inherent in the Survey,” such as moving between scales of representation, folk and systematic knowledge, desire and disdain for archiving identity, “we see some of the same pressures that we see in Beckett's work, where disavowal always means embracing, and abstraction is always haunted by traces of the concrete” (194).

By the time we get to Beckett, we are seeing the countereffects of a culture that was at one time obsessed with the survey and other projects of reminiscence and representation but has now moved beyond mere disillusionment with such practices into parody, or at least into a readiness for parody and utter subversion, which Beckett amply supplies. Parsons claims, for example, that “the extended discussion of topographical names in *Molloy* (Bally, Ballyba, Ballybaba and so on) reads in part as a critique of the survey's toponymic fantasies” (195). Indeed, given the narrator's repeated, failed attempts to comprehend “towns,” “districts,” and “regions,” one is inclined to agree with the argument that “all manner of perception is called into question in *Molloy* but the most persistent [is that of] scale” (208). The same is true of the compelling proposition that *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), with its layers of past recordings about past recordings and its “performance of the impossibility of decoding” (205–6), ruthlessly deconstructs both archival and cartographic epistemology.

In all, this is an ambitious and impressive study that offers important new frameworks for the study of modern Irish writing. Because of the number of major claims it puts forward about the historical and geographic scope of modernity and modernism in Ireland and the relationships between modernist form and the survey's episteme, there

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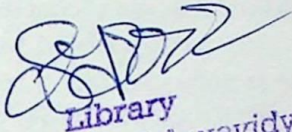
are times when one of these threads is difficult to sustain. This may be because the manifold argument is mostly sustained via close range studies of four individual writers spanning a century, two of whom were intentional in their formal subversions and firmly grounded in modernist canons, and two of whom are being claimed as modernists more on the grounds that their works are registers or formal analogs of an expanded field of modernity. One also wonders how Irish women writers have engaged the problematics of space, scale, and archive in colonial and postcolonial contexts, given that such concerns also feature significantly in works by Elizabeth Bowen and Kate O'Brien, to name only two. But far better a study that leaves room for further development than one that fails to put much at stake. And there can be no doubt that *The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature* puts much at stake: it offers a variety of groundbreaking, convincing claims, and the innovative framework that it introduces is destined to have a lasting impact on Irish and modernist studies.

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Twentieth-Century Literature

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On Twentieth-Century Literature's

Andrew J. Kappel Prize in Literary Criticism, 2018

The winner of this year's prize is Thomas Haddox's "Unmaking Generations: On Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and the Pastness of the Past." The judge is Rebecca L. Walkowitz, professor and chair of English and affiliate faculty in comparative literature at Rutgers University. Past president of the Modernist Studies Association, Walkowitz is the author or editor of ten books, including as author *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015) and *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (2006) and as editor, with Eric Hayot, *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* (2016) and, with Douglas Mao, *Bad Modernisms* (2006). She is now writing a book about the concept of the Anglophone and the representation of world languages in contemporary writing.

Professor Walkowitz writes:

This year's winning essay, "Unmaking Generations: On Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and the Pastness of the Past," offers a compelling test of the critical history of African American literature, interrogating two of its orthodoxies: the idea that the continuity of trauma, especially the trauma of slavery, is a necessary condition of "exposure and condemnation"; and the idea that "bodily proof" is more reliable and in some ways more authentic than "historical record." In this, the essay constitutes an ambitious and brave intervention, breaking substantially with long-standing critical approaches to the literary representation of slavery and with the emphasis on oral tradition (bodies rather than writing) within African American literature. "Unmaking Generations" presents Gayl Jones's 1975 novel about the legacies of New World slavery, *Corregidora*, first, as a test case for rethinking "the desire to make the past present," which the essay's author identifies in African American literature generally, and, second, as an example of a literary work that diverges from—or at least expresses ambivalence about—the claim that repeating trauma is the only way to resist it. So, the essay uses *Corregidora* to review a motif that is regnant within a whole literary tradition as well as to demonstrate how a single text might be self-conscious and self-critical about that motif. The result is a remarkable essay that calls on the field of African Americanist literary criticism to exercise greater self-criticism or at least self-questioning about repetition and continuity as formal, ethical, and political strategies for African American writing.

"Unmaking Generations" begins by drawing together the novel's explicit account of forced procreation as a feature of slavery and the novel's implicit account of "making generations" as a feature of narrative that bears witness to biological reproduction and gives us access to its condemnation. This is a complex argument, in which bearing children is both a literal and a figurative project: literal, because the main character, Ursa, is enjoined to give birth to female children who will "provide bodily proof" of the slaveowner Corregidora's impregnation of enslaved women, while also repeating the imperative to procreate; and figurative, because bearing children ensures new readers (people who will receive stories of the past) and thus the remembering of atrocity. The new generations are proof of the atrocity and witnesses to that proof.

The essay smartly encapsulates this complex reproductive dynamic, and then challenges its premises. The author argues that later generations do not, in fact, experience the past; and indeed that they would do better to imagine themselves as narrators rather than embodiments of that past. Going further, the author argues that the novel itself chooses "the pastness of the past" (halting repetition) rather than biological or political reproduction, or what Lee Edelman has called "reproductive futurism." The essay argues that, in the absence of future bodies, "there will be no justice for Corregidora's crimes" but also that the main character's desires "need not be subordinated to projects of justice and redemption." Implied here, also, is that only by breaking the cycle of reproduction can Ursa decouple sexuality from the violence of slavery. Finally, the essay asks us to reopen questions about the biology of the body and about the possibility of giving up the biological in exchange for the cultural. And questioning its own turn from continuity to rupture, it asks future critics to consider "the pastness of the past" as a dilemma yet to be resolved.

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The Andrew J. Kappel Prize in Literary Criticism, named for the late critic and esteemed deputy editor of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, is awarded annually to the author of a work submitted to the journal during the preceding year that is judged to make the most impressive contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the literature of the twentieth century. Nominees are chosen by the editor of *Twentieth-Century Literature* and members of the editorial board. A different prominent literary critic serves each year as judge. The prize includes an award of \$500 and publication in *Twentieth-Century Literature*.

Unmaking Generations: On Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and the Pastness of the Past

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Many critics have read Gayl Jones's novel *Corregidora* (1975) as testament to the continuity of the trauma of slavery across temporal and spatial boundaries. In nineteenth-century Brazil, "old man Corregidora, the Portuguese slave breeder and whoremonger" impregnated women, whom he had enslaved, including his own daughter, "and fathered his own breed" (C 8–9); in twentieth-century Kentucky, his descendant Ursa is repeatedly urged by her grandmother and great-grandmother to "make generations" (10) in order to provide bodily proof of these traumas against the purported erasure of the historical record. Ursa reflects that this emphasis on "procreation . . . could also be a slave-breeder's way of thinking" (22) and, indeed, this seems to be precisely the novel's point. For the *Corregidora* women, to testify to trauma is to repeat it, so that an ethical relation to the past—the exposure and condemnation of atrocity—becomes an affirmation of permanent identity with it. Ursa must bear children—preferably female children—but they must bear Corregidora's name. The possibility that the original trauma might end or be forgotten is thus figured as the extinction of the family. Such readings have proven attractive to critics invested both in the authenticity and irreparability of trauma and in black Atlantic and comparativist New World approaches said to provide a truer and aesthetically richer historical context in which to situate the writing of southern African Americans.¹ Moreover, such readings align well with long-standing characterizations of the African American literary tradition as oral—and therefore as irreducibly bodily—in its origin and continuing orientation, from Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) to the vast body of work, arguably extending as far back as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1845), that theorizes a blues aesthetic.

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There are, admittedly, excellent reasons to endorse these readings. In the second sentence of her master's thesis, titled "Toward an All-Inclusive Structure," Jones declared: "I believe that verbal authenticity is crucial to the understanding of what people essentially are" (quoted in Clabough 2008, 3). She went on to call her major critical work *Liberating Voices* (1991) and to argue in it, as Casey Clabough puts it, for "the significance of the African oral tradition amid a backdrop of undeniable, though not always debilitating, European cultural hegemony" (5).² Viewed through this lens, the *Corregidora* women combat not the loss of history but the waning of its emotional authenticity, which looms whenever the only remaining accounts of events—irrespective of their historical accuracy or inaccuracy—are those written down and thus alienated from their origins in human bodies and voices. Moreover, Jones's making Ursa a blues singer suggests that any possibility of her transcending the imperative to breed, or at least of making it signify differently, must come through the transmutation of trauma into music—a transmutation cast not just as an individual process but also as an indication of the survival of the African diaspora itself. In Ashraf H. A. Rushdy's words, for instance, her blues singing is "a sign that she has learned to overcome the horror of being bound to the past or, better, that she has found a way to translate into a cultural artefact the oppressive history of the *Corregidora* women, to create from her ancestors' and her experiences 'a song branded with the new world'" (2000, 278 [C 59]). "What do blues do for you?" Ursa asks herself at one point; when she replies, "It helps me to explain what I can't explain" (56), she encapsulates both the need to work through trauma and the impossibility of this work issuing forth as a narrative that can be mastered or concluded.

In this essay, I propose an alternative reading that has affinities both with work in queer theory and with recent critiques of the assumed political and ethical significance of historical continuity. Against both the claim of Ursa's grandmother that "making generations" prevents the loss of history and the claim of many critics that Ursa's blues affords an exemplary way not only to remember but also to redeem trauma, I argue that what is at stake in *Corregidora*—and what the novel struggles mightily, albeit ambivalently, to overcome—is what Stephen Best has recently called the desire to make the past present. Starting with the observation that "currently, it passes for an unassailable truth that the slave past provides a ready prism for apprehending the black political present," Best asks,

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"Why must we predicate having an ethical relation to the past on an assumed continuity between that past and our present and on the implicit consequence that to study that past is somehow to intervene in it? Through what process has it become possible to claim the lives and efforts of history's defeated as ours either to redeem or to redress?" (2012, 453, 454). Best argues that a great deal of contemporary criticism, instead of attempting to answer these questions, has unthinkingly fallen back on the overquoted Faulknerian dictum, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner 1951, 92). In the context of novels about slavery and its legacy, this amounts to conceptualizing the slave past as "not simply an object of experience or epistemology but the grounds of memory" (Best 2012, 460)—a process that reaches its apotheosis in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and in the widespread adoption of the term "rememory" not as a thematic internal to that novel but as a description of how the actual past manifests itself in the reading of African American literature.³ The example of *Corregidora*, however, suggests that Best might have understated how literally the notion of rememory might be applied: a full twelve years before Morrison proposed the term, Jones's novel proffers—but adamantly struggles against—the hypothesis that we can "claim the lives and efforts of history's defeated as ours" if we are their biological descendants. By the same token, if the claiming of the past is meant to have ethical value beyond a mere personal identification, it requires the projection of a future—the literal begetting of children. Only with the guarantee of a biological future—and the unbroken chain of testimony that it entails—can the ethical significance of the past be maintained, can historical traumas be both remembered and redeemed.

Rememory, in other words, is not just a matter of deliberate cultural preservation, available to anyone who participates in common traditions or shares memories; it functions, rather like transubstantiation in Roman Catholic theology, as a literal *embodiment* of the past, a "representing" experienced by those who are biologically (and therefore, as it were, apostolically) legitimate. It is also implicated in what Lee Edelman has called "reproductive futurism" (2004, 3) not only in its insistence on biological continuity but also in its ethical-cum-political hope that such continuity betokens future redemption—as Ursa's mother puts it, one day *Corregidora* and his fellow slaveholders will face God's judgment. I argue, then, that what Ursa struggles to realize in *Corregidora* is precisely the pastness of the past, the possibility that the past need not determine

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the present, that her desires need not be subordinated to projects of justice and redemption. At the same time, I argue that this realization remains ambivalent in the novel because it is predicated on a kind of futurelessness—namely, Ursa's infertility. In short, the novel's undoing of reproductive teleology invites a queer rejection of the claim that (in Edelman's words) "the biological fact of heterosexual procreation bestows the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations." It presents this queer possibility, however, not as a joyous shattering of social and familial relations but as a conclusion slowly arrived at. Embracing this possibility—endorsed by the novel's own structural teleology but regarded more ambivalently by Ursa herself—means recognizing that there will be no justice (save perhaps God's) for Corregidora's crimes, no future for Corregidora's family.

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I'll begin by asking just why the Corregidora women view the command to "make generations" as sacrosanct. Early in the novel, Ursa repeats Great Gram's justification to Mutt, her husband: "When they did away with slavery down there they burned all the slavery papers so it would be like they never had it" (C 9). Ursa first hears the story of Corregidora's violence at the age of five. When she asks, "*You telling the truth, Great Gram?*," she is slapped and rebuked: "*When I'm telling you something don't you ever ask if I'm lying. Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done—so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence*" (14). Initially, then, Ursa is told that making generations substitutes for documentary evidence that criminals have destroyed in order to escape punishment for their crimes. But this explanation is only plausible if making generations is meant to remember and avenge the personal victimizations of the Corregidora women themselves, not the atrocities of slavery writ large. The historical record, after all, affirms both that slavery existed in Brazil and that it was distinguished from slavery in other New World societies by forced prostitution on a massive scale—as distinct both from the widespread rape that masters inflicted on enslaved women and from socially recognized forms of interracial concubinage, such as *plaçage* (Rushdy 2000, 281). While the burning of official records might make it impossible for Corregidora's descendants to "prove" their victimizations in a court of law, this does not entail that without such documents, "it would be like they never had [slavery]."

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Indeed, suggesting the degree to which historical forgetting is inextricable from historical remembering, Gram implies that slavery cannot be “forgotten” if one wishes to commemorate its abolition, and that the destruction of some historically significant objects necessarily entails the preservation and even fetishization of others: “*And then they called Isabella, that was the princess, they started calling Isabella the Redemptress, you know, because she signed the paper with a jeweled pen*” (C 78–79). “Forgetting” slavery is not in the offing in *Corregidora*, and it seems likely that the story begins in Brazil not because that context provides a more apt illustration of the persistence of slavery’s traumas or of the desire to forget them, but because slavery was abolished in Brazil only in 1888, a full generation after the Thirteenth Amendment formally abolished it in the United States. A woman who is Ursa’s age during the novel’s present (1947–69) could more plausibly have had both a great-grandmother and a grandmother impregnated by a slaveholder, and could have heard their memories firsthand, if the story originates in Brazil—but even then, Great Gram’s choosing to remain with *Corregidora* after the end of slavery there seems necessary to make the timeline fully credible.

Critics who sympathize with the project to make generations tend to cast it as a corrective to the omissions, whether deliberate or accidental, of official historiography and to hold up against these failures the authenticity of memory, transmitted orally. If this involves merely a claim that history itself depends on the prior existence of memory, then of course this is true, though that truth has been obscured by a tradition of scholarly writing that tends to pit memory and history against each other—or, in a more recent turn, to cast what Houston Baker calls “poetic intuition” (2016, 3) as something that perpetually renews both history and memory.⁴ But the implicit stakes of this claim—that in the absence of orally transmitted memory and the bodies required to transmit it, justice can never be served—seem questionable. After all, *Corregidora* and all of his fellow slaveholders are long dead. When Irene, Ursa’s mother, looks forward to their fate at the Last Judgment—“*when the ground and the sky open up to ask them that question that’s going to be ask*” (C 41)—one wants to reply: but surely God doesn’t need your evidence to convict them? Young Ursa may have no good reason to question the facts of what happened to Great Gram, but she is right to question their significance and the imperative to repeat them ad infinitum. Her suspicions are aroused both by the relentlessly formulaic nature of the repeated narratives and by the

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fact that Great Gram has withheld some crucial information from her descendants—above all, the reason why she initially chose to remain with Corregidora. As Ursa puts it, “*Corregidora was easier than what she wouldn't tell me*” (102).

If making generations will neither serve the purposes of justice nor ensure that history will not be lost, it at least—tautologically—perpetuates the family. Family in the novel is figured both as biological continuity and as the unbroken transmission of memory; one without the other would spell its end. Moreover, the mystery of what Great Gram “wouldn't tell” Ursa foregrounds the problem of agency in relation to the perpetuation of the family. On the one hand, it's certainly true that while slavery required procreation, it had no use for families and indeed systematically worked to destroy familial bonds. To preserve the Corregidoras as a matriarchal family, in which fathers appear only as “breeders,” might be read as the forging of a measure of agency within the narrow limits where it might be exercised.⁵ Yet once slavery has ended, why does Great Gram choose to remain with Corregidora, and why does she not explain her decision to Ursa? And why does “making generations” thereafter require such close adherence to a script in which men are (or are presumed to be) racially mixed? One of Ursa's forebears—we're not told which—tells her, “*We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood*” (C 72). This strikingly mixed metaphor suggests a desire to make memories visible, a scar that can be perceived on the skin. But because blood is not ordinarily visible, it seems likely that “blood” refers to a skin tone that suggests an admixture of white ancestry and therefore a history of sexual coercion. As Robyn Wiegman might observe, the Corregidora women enforce the “visual knowledge regimes” (1995, 3) that ensure their stigmatization in a racist society.

Equally necessary to the continuation of the narrative is the begetting of female children. When Ursa asks Great Gram “if Grandmama had any brothers or sisters,” she is given a “real hateful look” (C 61). Afterward, Irene tells her that Corregidora had also fathered male children with Great Gram and Gram and had sold them off, but when Ursa asks why, Irene responds, “Don't ask *them* that. The only reason I'm telling you is so you won't ask them.” While it might be possible to read this as evidence that the loss of their sons is even more painful to Great

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Gram and Great Gram than the knowledge of the sufferings endured by their daughters, such a reading does not explain why Ursa must never ask this particular question, since Great Gram insists so stridently on her other victimizations at Corregidora's hands. Hostility to Ursa's question makes more sense if Gram and Great Gram have already internalized the notion that male children cannot "count" as members of the family, because they are unlikely to become prostitutes and thus to serve the specific purposes of the family's narrative. Such an explanation would also help to account for Irene's claim that immediately after Ursa's birth, "I knew they hated me then. Cause you come out all baldheaded. . . . They hated me, but then your hair start to sprout, and got real long. I used to put a little ribbon on your head so people would know you was a girl. People didn't know whether you was a boy or a girl" (117).

Making the past present, however, requires not just the reproduction of female children and the repetition of narratives of victimization but also, insofar as it is possible, the reenactment of those narratives. It's bad enough that younger members of the family cannot remember the entire history of victimization, and that even the feelings associated with what they do remember alter over time. As Gram puts it, "*Naw, I don't remember when slavery was abolished, cause I was just being born then. Mama do, and sometime it seem like I do too. . . . But it's hard to always remember what you were feeling when you ain't feeling it exactly that way no more*" (78-79). What's even worse is that the men necessary for making generations have no interest in playing Corregidora, and so managing them requires manipulation and entails obvious contempt. Though Irene conceives Ursa with Martin and later marries him, she emphatically tells Ursa she did not initially intend to become involved with Martin and had even thought dismissively of "making generations" because "I was never out looking for no man" (112). When Martin expresses interest in her, however, she immediately feels a desire for children, and even though she attributes it to having heard her family's narrative—"If Corregidora hadn't happened that part of my life never would have happened" (111)—she nevertheless perceives it not merely as an ethical demand but also as a biological one: "It was like my whole body wanted you, Ursa. Can you understand that?" (117).

Because he functions as Corregidora's avatar, it should not be surprising that Gram and Great Gram hate Martin. But, strikingly, their stated reason for hating him is that his skin is too black. Corregidora,

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we learn, always insisted that the enslaved women he kept as prostitutes only have sex with white men, and Gram and Great Gram make a point of frequently repeating this when Martin can overhear—"a black man wasn't nothing but a waste of pussy" (124)—as if to suggest that he is an inadequate fit for his role. In light of the Corregidora women's injunction to keep their "scar" as "visible as their blood," their dismissal of Martin seems clear: any offspring Martin fathered might be darker, might less visibly bear the "scar" of racial mixing, and thus might present less compelling evidence of Corregidora's crimes. The appearance of such children might not immediately suggest that sexual violation and slavery were implicated in their begetting.

When Martin eventually walks in on Gram naked and powdering her breasts—an encounter she may have contrived in order to provoke a crisis and remove him from Irene's life—she calls him a "nasty black bastard," and he calls her a "half-white heifer" (130), a confrontation that marks the effective end of the marriage. Irene later observes that Martin asks Gram and Great Gram "what I never had the nerve to ask. . . . How much was hate for Corregidora and how much was love" (131). The idea that they might have loved Corregidora even as they hated him makes sense given how insistently he is figured as the origin of familial identity. To love him—even while violently disavowing this love—is to love oneself. If any dissociation of these two loves is possible, such a process would begin exactly with Martin's question.

Ursa's husband, Mutt, is also unwilling to play Corregidora, but by this point family history has made any sexual relationship based on mutual desire all but impossible, even though, wanting more than a mere a sperm donor (156), Ursa, unlike her mother, has unambiguous sexual desire for her husband. Understanding that to accede to the requirement to "make generations" would be to endorse what she calls the "slave-breeder's way of thinking," Mutt tells Ursa, "I ain't *your* slave neither" (160), but then proceeds to assert his ownership of her—referring repeatedly, for instance, to "my pussy" and suggesting that he might sell her off when she sings in public, exposing herself to male gazes—in ways that nonetheless echo Corregidora. Indeed, he comes to enjoy denying sex to Ursa when she desires it, concluding—not without reason—that sexual pleasure for her is inseparable from the possibility of propagation. Their marriage ends after Ursa either falls or is pushed down the stairs during an argument (the text here is ambiguous) and, as a result of her injuries, must undergo

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a hysterectomy. Later, in imagined conversations with Mutt, Ursa tells him, "*It bothers me because I can't make generations. . . . It bothers me because I can't fuck. . . . It bothers me because I can't feel anything*" (90), as if each statement were the necessary consequence of the preceding one. Notwithstanding Mutt's (imagined) response that "*long as a woman got a hole, she can fuck*" (100) and her discovery (perhaps overdetermined in a novel of the 1970s) that during her subsequent, abortive marriage to Tadpole she experiences some intimations of sexual pleasure centered upon her clitoris and her anus, the novel does seem to bear out Tadpole's claim that immediately after the loss of her womb, Ursa can no longer achieve orgasm.

The temporal framing of the novel—we learn about Ursa's hysterectomy even before we hear of the *Corregidora* family's narrative—poses the narrative as Ursa's attempt to come to terms with the fact that "making generations" is for her no longer possible. Many of the novel's most affectively charged passages, presented in italics, consist either of memories of Great Gram's and Gram's narratives or Ursa's imagined conversations with Mutt about the meaning of their relationship, but even though many of these suggest an immediacy between the past and the present—or at least of Ursa's need to work out the relationship between them—they vacillate between, on the one hand, apparent claims that the past determines the present both biologically and affectively and, on the other, laments that Ursa herself never wanted to perpetuate the *Corregidora* narrative. At one point, Ursa maintains, "*I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddies. In her milk*" (77), suggesting that her role within the *Corregidora* family's narrative was determined virtually at birth; at another point, she protests that the story of her mother's marriage—and, indeed, her own—has been subordinated to Great Gram's and Gram's: "*I would rather have sung [Irene's] memory if I'd had to sing any. What about my own?*" (103). Clearly, Ursa wishes to define the scope of her own agency, though she must hear her mother's own account of her own relationship with her husband, which Ursa learns only belatedly, in order to realize that other possibilities exist beyond those represented by Great Gram and Gram.

If hearing Irene's story provides a catalyst for Ursa, it does not do so immediately. It is twenty-two years after Ursa and Mutt's separation that they meet again and, at the novel's end, begin an apparent reconciliation. Ursa performs fellatio on Mutt, having just realized "in a split second of

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love and hate" the secret that Great Gram has concealed from her—that she must have bitten Corregidora during the same act: "What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont [*sic*] to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (184). Stephen Best evokes Faulkner as a presiding spirit of literary rememory, and we can see in the imaginative identification with the past that Quentin and Shreve perform in relation to Henry and Charles Bon, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a precursor of Ursa's similar identification: "It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was Great Gram and Corregidora. . . . But was what Corregidora had done to *her*, to *them*, any worse than what Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return?"⁶ Yet here, instead of biting Mutt, Ursa pauses only long enough before he climaxes to say, "I could kill you." The final sentences of the novel suggest to most critics that their relationship has a future, that their mutual hostility is dissolving into a willingness not to hurt each other anymore:

He came and I swallowed. He leaned back, pulling me up by the shoulders.

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you," he said.

"Then you don't want me."

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you," he said.

"Then you don't want me."

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you," he said.

"Then you don't want me."

He shook me till I fell against him crying. "I don't want a kind of man that'll hurt me neither," I said.

He held me tight. (185)

The most optimistic readers can here apply Judith Butler's model of reiterated performativity, familiar from *Gender Trouble* (1990). The past is not dead, and Ursa is indeed repeating it, but in repeating it differently she has made space for more beneficent possibilities than existed before, even if the novel hesitates to affirm these possibilities unequivocally. As Rushdy puts it, "The solution . . . is neither to accept nor to deny the strictures of the past but to flaunt them in a different kind of re-enactment that simultaneously accentuates the performed quality of desire, sexuality, and racial identity" (2000, 291–92). I concur

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that something like this seems to have been Jones's intention. But the more fundamental question, perhaps, is why such a breakthrough on Ursa's part has been possible.

The most obvious reason is that the possibility of making generations has now been removed. Divorced from the imperative to procreate, sexuality can now assume a wider variety of expressions—not just fellatio but also, perhaps, the lesbianism represented in the characters of Cat and Jeffy, which Ursa may now be in a position to view as less threatening. Although the novel portrays Jeffy's sexual advances toward Ursa as predatory—in keeping with a larger pattern in Jones's work that has led some critics to decry it as homophobic—Ursa proleptically suggests that the violence of her reaction both to Cat and to Jeffy sprang less from knee-jerk homophobia than from anxiety about how she might experience heterosexual intercourse after her hysterectomy: “It wasn't until years later that I realized it might have been because of my own fears, the things I'd thought about in the hospital, my own worries about what being with a man would be like again, and whether I really had the nerve to try” (C 48).⁷ Indeed, Stella Setka has suggested that Ursa's singing and her performance of fellatio are thematically linked: “The sense of empowerment that she gains from artistic expression in turn enables her to move toward sexual healing in her intimate relationships, which she effectuates by shifting the site of her sexuality from her vagina to her mouth, a symbol of testimony, creation, and personal agency” (2014, 129–30).

To establish a link between nonprocreative sexuality and Ursa's singing is, of course, to return to the significance of the blues aesthetic. Undoubtedly, Jones situates her novel in an avowed blues tradition and intends for her readers to discern in Ursa's performance an empowering strategy for living with her traumas. In *Liberating Voices*, Jones provides a glossary of terms, and in the entry on “blues,” she comments: “As writers from Douglass to Baldwin have noted, outsiders often hear only the surface sounds, the entertainment value, but not the ‘deep song,’ its ritual significance and wisdom” (1991, 195).⁸ We know almost nothing about what occurs in the twenty-two years between Ursa's visit to Irene (during which she hears the story of Martin) and the reappearance of Mutt, but we do know that she has been working continuously at the Spider during that time (C 168), so we can presume her ongoing immersion in the blues' “ritual significance and wisdom.” Moreover, well before this

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moment, the novel provides hints that Ursa's performance seems more authentic as a result of her sufferings; Max, the club owner, tells her, "You got a hard kind of voice. . . . You know, like callused hands. Strong and hard but gentle underneath. The kind of voice that can hurt you" (96).

I would like, however, to express a modest skepticism about whether the blues can bear such tremendous, even fetishistic power, about whether they can function as a form of Morrisonian "rememory," by which the past is made present again, yet somehow tragically redeemed. There remains an important difference, after all, between historical knowledge and aesthetic experience, however blended they might be in the experience of a given text or artifact, however self-consciously artists and critics might pursue such blurring. But my skepticism also reflects a resistance to notions of racial and cultural authenticity that lie in wait when such arguments are proposed—as, for instance, when Jones emphasizes that "outsiders" see the blues very differently than others—and to the ostentatious piety that often accompanies them. Where Jeff Karem argues that "essentialism, a concept usually regarded as dead in contemporary cultural studies, has survived and is thriving, having gone incognito under the rubric 'authenticity'" (2004, 9), I suggest that *Corregidora* provides an exemplary case of how essentialism and even "race" itself seem incomprehensible without a covert appeal to the biological. Even racialized cultural expressions, such as the blues, gesture toward the notion that biological descent is the best if not the only guarantor of their continuing vitality. As Ursa puts it in one of her imagined conversations with Mutt, singing the blues is a response to a metaphorical insemination: "*They squeezed Corregidora into me, and I sung back in return*" (C 103).⁹ It seems significant here that Irene, who tried to defy the demand to make generations but ultimately succumbed to what her "body" wanted, also distinguishes between producing the blues and consuming them: "*Mama would say listening to the blues and singing them ain't the same. That's what she said when I asked her how come she didn't mind Grandmama's old blues records.*"

Is it possible, then, to render to the blues in *Corregidora* a measure of the power Jones attributes to them while still declining the virtually theological significance critics are primed to seek (a position perhaps analogous to Irene's claim that listening to and singing the blues are not the same)? Moreover, if singing the blues is still to be understood as a demand of the body (to which Irene was not immune), then can

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we at least grant some legitimacy to this dimension of the blues even as we question their claim to make the past present? It does seem clear that while "making generations" extends the cycle of prostitution and objectification into the future, the blues might well have beneficent psychic effects on Ursa and her listeners, perhaps constituting an alternative to biological continuity. Yet, importantly, Ursa's blues have no life beyond her and those who hear her singing: in *Corregidora*, reproducibility in music, no less than in human beings, seems necessarily tainted with the likelihood of traumatic repetition and of appropriation by sinister forces. Although the possibility that Ursa might have had a successful recording career is suggested in the novel first when Ursa tells Tadpole, "I coulda sung with Cab Calloway. . . . That time him and his band come out to Dixieland. He ask me to come up on stage with him, but I wouldn't do it" (C 81), the prospect of reproducing music seems troubling, as when a drunk man listening to Ursa sing proclaims, "Sinatra was the first one to call Ray Charles a genius. . . . And after that everybody called him a genius. They didn't call him a genius before that though. He *was* a genius but they didn't call him that. You know what I'm trying to tell you?" (169). Speaking of Billie Holiday, he suggests: "If you listen to those early records and then listen to that last one, you see what they done to her voice. They say she destroyed herself, but she didn't destroy herself. They destroyed her. . . . It's a sin and a shame" (170). Better, the text suggests, Ursa's obscurity in Lexington, Kentucky, than these fates of commercialization, appropriation, and destruction.

The queer critique of reproductive (and, ultimately, political) futurity suggests why the end of *Corregidora* might be read as a liberation from a burden imposed on Ursa by her forebears. And it also might help to illuminate why sexual pleasure in the text is frequently associated with violence. Ursa finds the violent, overbearing Mutt more desirable as a sexual partner than the solicitous Tadpole (who eventually despairs of satisfying Ursa and seeks his pleasures elsewhere), and Cat and Jeffy's relationship, full of violence and threats, stands as a challenge to those who want to identify lesbian relationships primarily with a nurturing mutuality. Perhaps this commingling of sexual pleasure and pain is itself an index of the novel's potential queerness, extending even to the possibility of sexual pleasure in the original relations with Corregidora himself (and thus to another possible reason why Great Gram initially remained with him after the abolition of slavery in Brazil). What might make such a

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queer reading troubling for some is precisely the degree to which African American politics and literary traditions have been conceived of as family matters. There are, however, signs of recent commerce between queer theory and African American critical work. Sharon Patricia Holland, for instance, has suggested that “since ‘the family’ has not only been the cornerstone of liberal ideology but also black community belonging, it is important to ask . . . whether or not the preservation of the idea of the ‘black’ family is working for us” (2012, 6). And, arguing that we “might have to resist the impulse to redeem the past and instead rest content with the fact that our orientation toward it remains forever perverse, queer, askew” (2012, 456), Best specifically “invites contemplation of the gains to be derived from extending the queer acknowledgment of nonrelationality between the past and the present to the racial case” (455).¹⁰ Perhaps the ancestor of all of these arguments can be found in Edward Said’s discussion of the turn from “filiation” (and therefore from the realms of “nature and of ‘life’”) to “affiliation” (and therefore “to culture and society” [1983, 20])—and in his caution that this turn might not always be an unambiguous good, that too often affiliation “reproduces the filiative discipline supposedly transcended by the educational process” (21).

If *Corregidora* struggles to overcome the desire to make the past present, however, it is, again, an ambivalent struggle. Suffering from the imperative to make generations, Ursa might indeed appreciate being freed from it, even at significant cost. And my pivoting away from a hermeneutics of trauma, rememory, and primordial authenticity, toward a reading more alert to rupture, lack of resolution, and even futurelessness, certainly stands as one way of accounting for the power of Jones’s novel. Yet the novel maintains mixed feelings about its own queerness, partly because, even though we see Ursa’s apparent reconciliation with Mutt, we do not hear her own interpretation of its significance. There is, indeed, no future—no more generations and, after Ursa’s own death, no more testimony to *Corregidora*’s crimes. Nor will her blues survive her. The possibilities of desire and mutual fulfillment, toward which the novel gestures in its concluding sentences, are real but highly ephemeral.

We may like the idea of replacing terms that carry an implicitly essentialist charge, such as “family” and “race,” with others that seem more about affiliation, constructedness, and the possibility of change—for instance, “culture,” “tradition,” “community,” or “blues.” But two significant difficulties persist across such an exchange of terms. On the

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one hand, in light of Edelman's brand of queerness, all of these terms appear suspect by virtue of their investment in continuity, in both a past and a future that may have little to do with desire in the present. On the other hand, those who remain committed to families, who value their biological reality and resist having it explained away, might well think that the price Ursa pays for her freedom from the imperative to breed is too high; they might also find it suspicious that Ursa does not herself voice such doubt. For several decades now, cultural criticism has granted a certain privilege to "the body," though always on the condition that it be understood not as "biological" but as thoroughly "cultural"—and therefore, at least theoretically, as unfixed in its meanings. Such a framing has, however, always been uneasy with the body's intractability, and with the limits its very materiality places on the transformative power of our desires. In this light, perhaps *Corregidora's* most immediate value lies in the starkness with which it poses the various dilemmas—racial, historical, and sexual—presented by that intractability. Perhaps a past that is truly past has no body at all. Perhaps the only way to be free of it is to unmake generations.

Notes

1. For examples of readings of *Corregidora* that draw upon trauma theory more generally, see Freed 2011, Griffiths 2006, and Setka 2014. A global emphasis on the African diaspora is evident throughout Jones's work but perhaps most foregrounded in her book-length narrative poem *Song for Anninho* (1981), published twelve years before Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

2. It is, however, possible to overstate how much Jones emphasizes the orality of African and African American literatures in contradistinction to other traditions. In her postscript to *Liberating Voices*, written ten years after the chapters preceding it, Jones praises Henry Louis Gates, Houston A. Baker, Mary Helen Washington, Valerie Smith, Hortense Spillers, Hazel Carby, Abena P. B. Busia, and Deborah E. McDowell for their involvement in "this restoring of the voice" (1991, 192). Yet she also holds that "the problems of the freed voice apply not only to African American literature and criticism, but to all the world's literatures and criticisms." Jones's model of orality as a revitalizing response to the tyranny of rigid forms holds just as true for non-African and non-African American literary traditions, and she identifies Geoffrey Chaucer, Miguel Cervantes, Federico García Lorca, Murasaki Shikibu, James Joyce, Mark Twain, and Margaret Laurence as exemplars (3–11).

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3. In *Beloved*, “rememory” is Sethe’s coinage. As she explains it to Denver, “If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. . . . The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you waiting for you” (Morrison 1987, 36). Such a conception of rememory as history is indeed specifically literary, as Best argues: “Literariness is key here, for narrative and the act of reading together sustain the feeling of loss. It is a feeling that literature produces, not history, because literary texts, as intentional objects, possess silences and ellipses that are structural, whereas silence in nonliterary discourse is not always the sign of an intention” (2012, 461).

4. Paul Ricoeur puts it most succinctly: “We have nothing better than memory to guarantee that something has taken place before we call to mind a memory of it. Historiography itself, let us already say, will not succeed in setting aside the continually derided and continually reasserted conviction that the final referent of memory remains the past, whatever the pastness of the past may signify” (2004, 7). In his recent work on the notion of an “intuiting archive,” Houston Baker associates “poetic intuition” with the work of Édouard Glissant and contrasts it to familiar modes of understanding history: “History’s everyday use is to mold written self-defenses against the ever-beating sea of the repressions and suppressions of fractured memory. By contrast, Glissant valorizes the poetic intuition. . . . The problem with conceptualizing ‘archive,’ ‘canon,’ or ‘history’ in the strains of normal disciplinary practice of literary history is that in the absence of poetic intuition, one merely makes another deposit in history’s consignments without troubling its fervid limitations and fissures” (2016, 3). I’m happy to agree that there are “limitations and fissures” in history, but does poetic intuition always necessarily “trouble” them—or, indeed, is this “troubling” always a beneficent or brave act, instead of (as it often appears) a reflex toward novelty or the product of a demand to keep the publication mills churning? Might it be that the need to go on producing new and different accounts of the past—and so extending our scholarly identities and projects into the future—is, like politics itself, yet another expression of Edelman’s reproductive futurity?

5. Thematically, Hortense Spillers’s influential article “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (1987) suggests itself here: the “matriarchal” descent of the Corregidora women is verifiable. But if the origin of the family is to be found in an original trauma, then the principle of biological continuity suggests that the trauma be reenacted: the paternity of Corregidora’s daughters must be in some sense uncertain, illegitimate, aligned with or implicated in racial mixing and violence. If Morrison’s *Beloved* provides the primary literary touchstone

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for rememory, it can be argued that Spillers's article provides an equivalent theoretical grounding. As Best puts it, "The history of the black Atlantic comes into existence only through loss and can in turn be sustained only through more tales of its loss" (2012, 458). From the perspective of Great Gram and Gram, it would seem that if these "tales of loss" can be anchored materially in verifiable biological descent, so much the better.

6. Compare a parallel passage in *Absalom, Absalom!*:

Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking. So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve: four of them and then just two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry. (Faulkner [1936] 1990, 275)

7. Ursa later imagines a conversation with Cat in which she seems to suggest that she had been afraid of clitoral pleasure and that this might have been part of the failure of her marriage to Tadpole: "*Afraid only of what I'll become, because those times he didn't touch the clit, I couldn't feel anything*" (C 89). See Jacobs 2014 for a useful summary of critical responses to Jones's alleged homophobia—and, in my view, a more productive reading of such moments in *Corregidora*.

8. Jones appears to allude here to the passage in Douglass's *Narrative* in which he speaks of "those rude and apparently incoherent songs" sung by his fellow slaves, to which he "trace[s his] first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery" (1845 [2000], 290). Interestingly, however, Douglass's text seems in fact to contradict Jones's meaning. Douglass maintains, "I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension." Where Jones's formulation poses an understanding of slavery as a "rememory" accessible even to African Americans who are generations removed from it, Douglass seems to emphasize distance from the immediacy of the trauma as a necessary precondition for understanding it. It should also be noted, though, that some theorists have questioned whether the singing that Douglass speaks of should be identified with the blues; Amiri Baraka, for instance, insists, "The Blues is secular; it is also post-chattel slavery. The drumless African choir sound of the Sorrow Songs . . . gives way to a sassier—actually 'more' African and more contemporary—American" (1991, 102).

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9. Walter Benn Michaels has argued that “there are no anti-essentialist accounts of identity” because “the essentialism inheres not in the description of the identity but in the attempt to derive the practices from the identity—we *do* this because we *are* this” (1995, 181). Without necessarily accepting Michaels’s claim so categorically, I do think it explains the logic of action in *Corregidora* quite precisely: we do this (make generations) because we are this (Corregidora’s descendants). It seems to me an open question whether even queer theory escapes this logic. Edelman’s alignment of queer desire with the death drive, for instance, would seem to augur a “refus[al of] identity or the absolute privilege of any goal” (2004, 22), yet even though he eventually arrives at the claim that the death drive renders us all in some sense “queer,” we can still distinguish “queer” individuals by virtue of their embrace of negativity, in contrast to those who *attempt* to do things contrary to their own death drive but cannot ultimately succeed: “Defenders of futurity, buzzed by negating our negativity, are themselves, however unknowingly, its secret agents too, reacting, in the name of the future, in the name of humanity, in the name of life, to the threat of the death drive we figure with the violent rush of a *jouissance*, which only returns them, ironically, to the death drive in spite of themselves” (153). We do this because we are this, even when we don’t want to do it.

10. On what Best calls the “queer acknowledgment of nonrelationality between the past and the present,” see especially Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* (2009). To be sure, the question of just how much queer “identity” (a particularly problematic word in this context, since “queer” is so often taken to be anti-identitarian) can function as something like what Leo Bersani calls “an anticomunal model of connectedness” (1995, 127–28) does not seem altogether settled.

§

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Hard Romping: Zora Neale Hurston, White Women, and the Right to Play

Adrienne Brown

Zora Neale Hurston's 1928 article "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" and Virginia Woolf's 1929 extended essay "A Room of One's Own" were published within a year and a half of one another.¹ Though there is nothing within the historical record to suggest that either Hurston or Woolf read the other, both take up the female artist's sovereignty in interracial terms. "A Room of One's Own" finds Woolf envisaging the wealth of art Englishwomen of the past might have produced had they been afforded the essay's titular space denoting not only spatial independence but economic and social equality. References to colonialism and slavery permeate her account of English patriarchy. While lamenting the fact that Englishwomen were unable to equally benefit from acts of primitive accumulation—leaving them economically and culturally poorer at present than their male counterparts—Woolf nonetheless wields the alleged absence of Englishwomen from scenes of colonialization as evidence of their moral superiority. Declaring that men innately take pleasure in ownership, be it of "a piece of land or a man with curly black hair," Woolf insists on the relative restraint of her white countrywomen, positing that "it is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman out of her" (2000, 39).

The impossibility of Woolf's desire here—wishing for Englishwomen to have reaped the same benefits as their male peers from economies of slavery and settler colonialism while also claiming their noncomplicity in these acts—has been most fiercely addressed by literary critic Jane Marcus, who connects this infamous passage in "A Room of One's Own" to the larger specter of slavery and colonialism circling Woolf's life and work. In her reading of Woolf's *Negress*, Marcus notes how her choice of nouns denies the existence of nonwhite Englishwomen while the sentence's

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central verb—to *pass*—further situates these figures in nonrelation to one another. Passing the other as a benevolent act of *leaving be*, Marcus suggests, also portends a *leaving behind*. In Marcus's reading, Woolf's Englishwoman looks backward at the "fine negress" (quoted in Marcus 2003, 41) while moving forward to attain a room of her own that the Negress would likely be unable to either enter or possess as a peer.

But passing does not only mark the distance between two figures; it also suggests the potential for their intimacy. Two entities in the process of passing have yet to move beyond one another. They remain proximate for the act's duration—close enough to graze or impede the other's progress. Passing is not inherently progressive or regressive as a social relation rooted in spatial immediacy. It is, rather, Woolf's desire to extract herself from the scene of passing by means of possessing private space—allowing her to shut out the kinds of complicated relationality within which passing imbricates her and her white Englishwomen peers—that situates this act within a broader antirelational schema organized around occlusion. Woolf's articulation of a room of one's own as the end-game for women artists ultimately supplements her desire to pass the "fine Negresses" for good, definitively severing their relationality.

Though Zora Neale Hurston's essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" has not been recognized as such, we might think of it as a treatise on the conditions of black women's writing sharing a genre with Woolf's essay, if not her conclusions. Whereas Woolf advocates for her white peers to attain a room of their own—a form of private property insulated from intrusions both domestic and public in nature—Hurston describes the value she finds in continually making herself public, of putting her body out in the world and on the line. As with Woolf's essay, the act of passing plays a pivotal role in Hurston's framing of the relationship between black and white women. But Hurston perpetually marks the failure of these bodies to pass one another cleanly or easily and without disturbance. In the opening vignette of "Colored Me," for instance, Hurston details how both white men and women "passing through" the all-black town of Eatonville in which she grew up would pass by her front porch. The quality of Hurston's childhood performances on this makeshift stage induced passersby to pause or invite her to "go a piece of the way" with them. The young Hurston accepts "small silver" from the white visitors to hear her "speak pieces" and "dance the parse-me-la" but notes that these monetary exchanges "seemed strange to me for I wanted to do them so much that I needed bribing to stop, only they didn't know it" ([1928] 1995, 826). While "colored people gave no dimes" and "deplored any

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joyful tendencies in me," Hurston insists, "I was their Zora nevertheless. I belonged to them, to the nearby hotels, to the county—everybody's Zora." If Woolf imagines the white Englishwoman as passing the "fine negress" in pursuit of a private room where she can produce fictions *about* relationality by extracting her body from the risks *of* relationality, Hurston worries that the commodification of her body and art may compromise the socially embedded forms of reciprocity she most prizes. Despite being a self-avowed fan of the free market, Hurston here considers what other forms of value emerge in the course of grazing, colliding, and roughhousing with others, privileging the production of commonwealth over private profit when she can afford to.

Whereas Woolf depicts spatial sovereignty as the means for securing white women's artistic and racial sovereignty, we find Hurston describing moments when she relinquished control over her space, body, and art—sometimes with pleasure, sometimes with great pain—to place herself, often literally, in the path of white women who were her most regular patrons. Nowhere is this pattern more visible than in Hurston's 1942 autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Hurston's accounts of her encounters with white women in this text could be described as strange and even wild at times, punctuated by moments of both transcendence and mischief. The power dynamics limning these relationships prove largely uneven given Hurston's reliance on her white female associates for employment and patronage. But Hurston describes these relationships—unfolding mostly within these white women's homes serving as sites of both alienated labor and deep intimacy—as being organized around intense moments of play, exchange, or revelation that briefly suspend relational scripts of employer-employee, benefactor-beneficiary. Though these moments fail to upend these power differentials, they suggest Hurston's investment in feeling her way into forms of solidarity even if they eventually fizzle.

What follows is an attempt to grapple with Hurston's fitful representations of her relationships with white women in her controversial memoir, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Labeled evasive and hard to swallow by even her staunchest supporters, it was famously condemned by Alice Walker in 1977 as "the most unfortunate thing Zora ever wrote" (2003, 91). Hurston biographer Valerie Boyd similarly concluded that "the Zora of *Dust Tracks* was not as politically astute, outspoken, irreverent, or complex as the real Zora was" (2002, 360). Criticism of Hurston's memoir has largely centered on its omissions. While we know that Hurston's editors at Lippincott censored her objections to American imperialism from the book's first edition, it has proved harder to attribute the decision to

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minimize the presence of Jim Crow in her account of coming of age in the American South or the choice to omit almost all details of her professional life as a writer and an anthropologist. Critics have largely dealt with *Dust Tracks*' omissions by either reproaching its content as Walker and Boyd do or by focusing on apposite moments said to resist or subvert the limitations placed upon her.² Given what we know today about her fractious relationships with figures such as Charlotte "Godmother" Mason and writer Fannie Hurst, it is tempting to read Hurston's decision to foreground her encounters with white women in *Dust Tracks* in a similar vein—either condemning them as moments where Hurston compromised to pander to white audiences or to frame the book as an ur-postmodern exercise in resisting desires to claim her. But when we take her renderings of these encounters at their word, treating them as moments when Hurston is actively negotiating the difficulties of these relationships rather than as evidence of her dissimulation, they suggest her recurring interest in forms of improvisatory play disrupting conventional scripts of relationality while raising questions about the possibilities and the limits of these intimacies as forms of solidarity. By focusing not on which encounters Hurston chose to represent or elide but rather *how* Hurston represents her encounters with the people, genres, and structures she depicts, we get an alternative way of emplotting Hurston in her memoir as a manager of forms rather than as an erratic and cagey reactor or flawed political subject.

Relative to the ever-growing scholarship on interracial modernisms, there has been less work dedicated to limning the specific relationships between white and black women encountering one another as artists, patrons, and laborers. Carla Kaplan's *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance* (2013) has recently done much to rectify this disparity by recovering the roles white women played in fostering the work of black artists in the early twentieth century, roles largely underseen and little understood. Though Kaplan's emphasis is on detailing the real lives of these various "Miss Annes"—a colloquialism for white women in this period—when Kaplan briefly considers their concurrent literary representation, she insists on its recurring flatness. Citing the work of male writers, including Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, Carl Van Vechten, James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Richard Wright, Kaplan writes that in modernist writing, the "Miss Anne" figure "almost always appears either as a fool or a monster" (2013, 23). "The more well-meaning or well-intentioned such women are," Kaplan continues, "the more dangerous they become" (23–24).

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Hurston's representations of white women in her memoir, however, belie Kaplan's characterization of their representation as dismissable caricatures. Hurston devotes an inordinate amount of room to describing her repeated—and repeatedly strange—encounters with the white women who largely served as her benefactors. Far from fools or monsters, the white women in *Dust Tracks* often appear as elliptical and inscrutable as Hurston herself. While Hurston never allows her readers to forget the inherent power imbalances underlying these cross-racial interactions, these encounters also exceed classifications of primitivism, self-censorship, or cautious deference. Following Toni Morrison's method for reading Willa Cather in *Playing in the Dark*, I aim to do more than “simply . . . assert the failure” of these scenes as merely bad or problematic—a strategy that, as Morrison writes, has allowed us to “evade the obligation to look carefully” (1993, 18). Literary critic Anne Cheng makes a related assertion about modernism, suggesting that “when it comes to symptoms such as primitivism or orientalism, what invites our reading is not colonial ideology's repressed content but its surprising expressiveness” (2012, 4). Like these critics, I aim to look closely at Hurston's perplexing and at times discomfiting encounters with white women in *Dust Tracks*, reading them not as instances of either buried repression or canny subversion but as moments where Hurston and her white benefactors use each other to perform their restlessness, longing, and fury. She turns these encounters into occasions for imagining forms of intimacy that, rather than rendering difference invisible, can acknowledge difference as the difficult condition of encounter itself.³ Hurston ultimately poses these strange and estranging physical and psychic exchanges as risks all bodies, even those of black women who have historically been denied corporeal sovereignty, must consider hazarding in seeking ways of moving beyond together.

§

Toward the end of “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” Hurston once again positively describes herself as a person in public. But where her childhood porch routines deliver mutual pleasure to her and the white passersby, the more figurative performances the adult Hurston delivers to her white spectators end not in emotional reciprocity but in impasse: “It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep. The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed” ([1928]

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1995, 827). The surety of her performance as a racialized subject produces affective indeterminacy in Hurston's white beholders, leaving them unsure "whether to laugh or to weep" in response to what they must bear witness to. The easy relationality she finds as a child in Eatonville changes here into something more vexed. Whereas Hurston experiences holding the national stage as stimulating, her white spectators seeking refuge from her ongoing presence in their private residences remain haunted by "brown specters" who follow them there, refusing to let them pass.

Hurston would continue to frame herself as the unhindered performer privy to the pains and pleasures of her spectators in her decidedly unconfessional 1942 memoir. Rather than providing an account of a private self existing beneath her public persona, as convention might dictate, Hurston in *Dust Tracks* most persistently describes her life as lived in and amid other people's rooms and private lives, with little reference to her own interiors. She never quite steps off of the stage in her memoir, recounting instead her ongoing status as "everybody's Zora" in her relationships with family, employers, and famous friends. Her access to the private lives of others as a domestic worker, ethnographer, and perpetual subject of patronage provides much of the memoir's material. In fact, *Dust Tracks* might be better described as a story of *coming to genre* rather than one of *coming of age*, as Hurston reveals much more about the aesthetic and affective forms she encounters through others than the self produced in their wake. From her childhood love of epics to the melodramatic tropes of the "Love" chapter, Hurston substitutes the details of her own life with descriptions of the genres and worlds she glimpses through the people, poetry, and performances she chances upon.⁴

When Hurston's mastery of genre has been invoked by critics of her work, it has usually been used to lament her need to use this proficiency to better appeal to white audiences.⁵ But Hurston's rendering of white women in *Dust Tracks* complicates understandings of the text as compromised by its attention to white readerly desires. Hurston's portraits of her relationships with the white women are not exactly flattering. She refuses effusive empathy or deferential idioms of care, most frequently rendering these women as puzzling ciphers. Before considering Hurston's encounters with white women in depth, let me first elucidate the different tactics she uses to render her respective encounters with white men and black women in order to place these other depictions in greater relief. Hurston generally scripts her encounters with white men in *Dust Tracks* as straightforward exchanges that produce mutual understanding, enacting a Habermasian form of communicative action.⁶ It is in conversation with

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white male interlocutors where Hurston most explicitly addresses race and the legacy of slavery as a formal social issue. Her relationships with black women are by contrast almost mirror opposites of these relations. Unlike the public debates staged with her white male discussants, Hurston's relationships with black women usually take place within domestic spaces. These relationships are not cast as warm sites of relief from the public sphere but are often strained by contentious generational divides, as with her grandmother or Cally, the maid with whom she works as a teenager, or, by abstraction, taking on an air of distant admiration, as do her relationships with her school friends and, later, with Ethel Waters. Far from sites of easy or restorative affiliation, Hurston's relationships with black women appear in *Dust Tracks* as either openly combative or remotely formal.

If white men in *Dust Tracks* appear as the ideal jocular partners with which mutual understanding becomes possible, and black women, whether as friends or foils, emerge as distant allies, white women most fully appear as compelling and unpredictable oddballs with whom Hurston forms chaotic relations. There are roughly nine such discreet encounters described in her memoir. After the narration of her immediate family, Hurston devotes the most space in the text to these relationships. White women primarily appear in two forms in the book: as invalids Hurston cares for in the odd jobs she works between literary gigs and described only in brief, and as patrons whose class and racial privilege allow them to either engage in or facilitate Hurston's own desires. In what follows, I focus on four of Hurston's most fully described encounters with white women in *Dust Tracks* mostly taking this latter form.⁷

The first white women to appear in Hurston's memoir are a group of Minnesotan Christians who visit her Eatonville grade school classroom. Though these polite philanthropists do not exhibit anything like the wildness Hurston experiences with later patrons, they offer her luxuries that move her in descriptively similar ways and serve as Hurston's first introductions to an aesthetic and affective world beyond Eatonville. First emphasizing the foreignness of these visitors in her piecemeal description of their bodies, focused on their hair texture, glittering rings, and "flower-looking fingers" ([1942] 1995, 590), Hurston recounts being asked to read aloud for these women, presumably as a demonstration of the worthy students these white patrons might help to educate. After Hurston delivers a particularly spunky performance, the Minnesotans reward her with "one hundred goldy-new pennies," which she describes as loving not out of "avarice" but rather for "the beauty of the thing"

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(592). Once the Minnesotans return home, their sponsorship continues in the form of sent books. Hurston details her affective experiences of these works, describing her joy in reading Greek myths while decidedly rejecting the stories featuring “sweet and gentle little girls” martyred to their own goodness, girls the young Zora finds to “have no meat on their bones” (594)—a critique that seems to obliquely apply to her own charitable patrons. Though young Zora is grateful to these women, the Minnesotans prove most useful to her as gateways to these delicious narrative horizons. They are the first to make available to Hurston an aesthetic practice premised on losing oneself, a productive disorientation so intense she feels as if she is leaving her body, which is how Hurston categorizes her youthful experiences of reading. She devours stories of Thor and Hercules and tales by Hans Christian Andersen and Robert Louis Stevenson that “seemed to know what I wanted to hear and said it in a way that tingled me.” Reading ultimately causes Hurston to feel a discomfiting “anguish” since, as she describes it, “My soul was with the gods and my body in the village” (595).

The Minnesotans reward Hurston for her intellectual gifts, but we see her trying to accept these gifts on her own terms. In addition to rejecting books reifying the “sweet” goodness of her Christian patrons, Hurston accepts their offer of a hundred “goldy-new pennies” not as a monetary payment but as an aesthetic gift. They entice her not on account of their exchange value but as arresting objects that, much like the stories she reads, are charged with having “moved her” with their beauty. While the Minnesotans attempt to collect Hurston—taking a photo of her before they leave, anticipating the more exacting collecting of Hurston undertaken by her patron, “Godmother” Charlotte Osgood Mason—we see Hurston redirecting this payment into a system of aesthetic appreciation from which only her senses profit. Hurston would continue to be a “bad” investor for much her life, forsaking profit and economic stability to pursue objects and moments she associated with beauty or love in ways that confounded both her contemporaries and her later critics. This early encounter with the Minnesotan women—Hurston’s first experience with the white female patronage that would order much of her working life to come—finds her approaching these women as vessels for getting to an elsewhere she badly wants to reach. Her increasingly unruly encounters with white patrons and employers replicate this fundamental structure of exchange that is both intensely valued and a bit thorny.

The next such encounter to garner extended description in *Dust Tracks* involves Hurston’s experience working as a nanny. Hurston begins

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by noting that she generally failed to hold domestic jobs for very long, being frequently fired for “getting tangled up with their reading material” or making “friends with the children” (636). While “going out to play did not help much on jobs,” Hurston laments, she describes an exceptional situation when “one woman liked me for it.” Hired to look after the woman’s daughters, ages seven and five, Hurston notes how frequently “somehow or other, we three found ourselves in a tussle. Screaming, laughing, splashing water and tussling” (637). Her ethics of play disturbs the other worker in the household, Cally, an older black maid with whom she wars before eventually making peace. Hurston also eventually wins the heart of the children’s mother, a “very beautiful woman in her middle twenties” who gazes at Hurston through her looking glass, causing each to “start to grinning for some reason or another.” Despite “having all the fun in the world” with her female employer, Hurston is eventually fired by the woman’s husband, an action, she speculates, meant to keep his wife at home with the children and prevent her potential straying. Beyond marking the mother’s good sense in recognizing Hurston’s talent for play, this odd vignette lacks an intrinsic moral. Hurston doesn’t seem to value the women for whom she works for their particular characteristics, prizing instead the opportunity they give her to tussle, laugh, and stare for a living. Like the Minnesotans, the mother has both the means and the inclination to validate Hurston’s practice of imagination. There is a reciprocity to the gazing between Hurston and her employer—perhaps acknowledging their dual domestic detention, if under different circumstances; but this gaze is abruptly foreclosed when Hurston is suddenly deemed expendable. Hurston marks both the trancelike intensity of her connection with her white female employer and the fleetingness of their solidarity.

Hurston’s keenness for energetic corporeal play follows her into adulthood, becoming a feature of her relationships with white women more generally. Such a scene occurs later in the same chapter, in fact, when Hurston goes to work for an actress in a traveling theater troupe. While Hurston’s employer is a young woman approximately her own age (although Hurston’s age in these sections is hard to pin down), they relate to each other much like Hurston related to her previous child charges. After detailing her mischievous exploits while on tour as well as the many tricks the company’s members played on her, Hurston focuses on her specific relationship with her employer, “Miss M—,” whose moods swung between being “as playful as a kitten” to displaying “solemn and moody” bouts of feeling, culminating in this erratic scene:

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Sometimes she could become excessively playful. It was puzzling to see a person cry a while and then commence to romp like a puppy and keep it up for hours. Sometimes she had to have sherry before she went to bed after a hard romp with me. She invented a game for us to play in our hotel room. It was known as "Jake." She would take rouge and paint her face all over a most startling red. Then I must take eye-shadow and paint myself blue. Blue Jake and Red Jake would then chase each other into closets, across beds, into bath rooms, with our sheet-ropes trailing around us and tripping us up at odd moments. We crouched and growled and ambushed each other and laughed and yelled until we were exhausted. Then maybe the next day she hardly said a word. (655-56)

There's not much that separates this scene with Miss M— and Hurston's earlier description of romping with her child charges. In both scenarios, although Hurston enters and leaves these encounters in the same positions of relatively diminished power as domestic laborer, in the midst of the encounter the sense of who's in charge of whom, or who's beholden to whom, seems to loosen. If reading is Hurston's first avenue to occupying an elsewhere beyond her corporeal present, physical play here functions in a similar fashion. Instead of books, it is the tribal bodies the pair simulate in private through their racial and gender drag that gets them beyond themselves. Their play is eruptive yet temporary, the zenith of an emotional wave followed by the nadir of silence Hurston dramatically juxtaposes with the sparseness of a singular sentence.

Dress-up, play, and the stretching out of time mark yet another version of this relationship taking place between Hurston and her eventual employer, novelist Fannie Hurst. Best remembered today for her 1933 novel, *Imitation of Life*, Hurst was one of the most popular novelists in America in the first half of the early twentieth century. Hurston dedicates half of the chapter "Two Woman in Particular" to her friendship with Hurst, devoting the second half to famous black singer and actress, Ethel Waters. Literary critic John Lowe mournfully observes that while Hurston devotes a chapter of her autobiography to these women, she garners no mention in either of these women's respective memoirs, suggesting Waters and Hurst belong to the category of people Hurston "cared for deeply" but who eventually "criticized her, underestimated, or just drifted away from her" (1996, 301), leaving her to die a pauper's death in 1960. What Lowe doesn't account for is the possibility that Hurston's interest in these

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women's friendship may have been just as cynical, her invocation of her intimacy with these famous names seeming like one of *Dust Tracks*' most egregious attempts at marketability.

But if this chapter was designed to trade on the names of these famous friends to draw readers, the descriptions she gives of these friends and friendships fail to conform to models of quiet admiration or garrulous fawning that such a tactic might suggest. If Waters's and Hurst's fame is an important factor for including them in this chapter, their races may be too. While Hurston claims to single these two friends out for their "rare talents," readers of *Dust Tracks* have pointed to the deliberateness of the chapter's description of Hurston's relationship with a black friend and a white friend, with Deborah Plant suggesting that the chapter functions as "a symbolic microcosm of the egalitarian ethics of the narrator's created world" (1995, 25). Hurston describes Waters in terms of her reserve, painting herself as Waters's protector when she is pressured not to perform spirituals at a Carnegie Hall concert. And yet, though Hurston initially describes Waters as "one of the strangest bundles of people that I have ever met" ([1942] 1995, 739), there is nothing particularly strange about the account she gives of either Waters or their relationship as Hurston goes on to describe Waters's lack of formal education, her Catholicism, and her use of metaphoric language. While she describes Waters as "gay and somber by turns," Hurston's evidence for this claim amounts to having "listened to her telling a story" and "notic[ing] her change of mood in mid-story" (741). What stands out the most in her profile of Waters is its relative ordinariness.

In contrast to the one of Waters, the portrait Hurston paints of her relationship with Fannie Hurst reads as markedly strange. As an older undergraduate at Barnard and one of the few black students, Hurston had a difficult time finding funding. Hurst hired her in 1925 as a secretary, a title Hurston would later elevate to "amanuensis" in a 1937 article for the *Saturday Review*, though her employment lasted only a few weeks. Hurst and Hurston's relationship, like Hurston's later relationship with "Godmother" Mason, is probably best categorized by its emotional ebbs and flows. Although they remained in contact after Hurston's employment and defended each other in print at various points in their careers, the record of their relations is marked by strain. Hurst wrote an at best tepid recommendation for Hurston's application for a Guggenheim in 1934, referring to her as an "erratic worker" and "undisciplined thinker" (Kroeger 1999, 189). In a sketch for the *Yale University Library Gazette* after Hurston's death in 1960, Hurst celebrates her for being as

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"uninhibited as a child" and notes how "illogically, indeed incredibly, irresponsibility was one of Zora's endearing qualities" (1960, 20). For Hurston's part, in a letter to her friend Constance Sheen only a few months after the end of her formal employment with Hurst, she wrote that "a kind letter from you gives me just as much or more pleasure as one from any celebrity. They are OFTEN insincere. Their show of friendship mere patronage" (quoted in Kaplan 2003, 42).

But rather than suggesting simply that Hurston had to lie in her memoir in order to maintain institutional support and that these more private records reveal the truth of her association with Hurst, I approach *Dust Tracks* as Hurston's attempt to render the peculiar contours of their relationship, which appears in these moments neither as glamorous nor celebratory but decidedly off-kilter. If Ethel Waters's moods "turn," Hurst's by comparison could be said to somersault. Take the first sentences Hurston dedicates to Hurst in her memoir: "From day to day she amazed me with her moods. Immediately before and after a very serious moment you could just see her playing with her dolls. You never knew where her impishness would break out again" ([1942] 1995, 735). The scene Hurston sets here is ambiguous, leaving it unclear as to whether Hurst actually plays with dolls or just makes one think that she might. This confusion accumulates as we get more examples of Hurst's "impishness," the first involving Hurston having "caught her playing at keeping house" (734). She watches "Miss Hurst herself open the door and come in, greet herself graciously and invite herself to have some tea. Which she did." According to Hurston, Hurst "played she had company with her for an hour or more," having tea with herself and her pretend companion before returning to work (735). "When she was tired of her game," Hurston continues, "she just quit and was a grown woman again." In a second anecdote, Hurston describes being "tricked" by Hurst into bringing her galoshes into the city while Hurst sneaks home, appearing "stretched out on the divan, all draped in a gorgeous American beauty housecoat" when a wet Hurston returns to her residence. Hurst had "grown again by then, and looking just as solemn as if she never played." In one of their final narrated interactions, Hurston recalls being asked by her employer to drive her from New York to Maine for a short visit. Hurst continually alters their destination, steering them first to Saratoga, then to Niagara Falls, and on into Canada to visit Hamilton and Kitchener, as they spend a total of "an exciting two weeks motoring over Ontario, seeing the country side" (737). Hurston marvels at this "great artist and globe famous, behaving like a little girl, teasing her nurse to take her to

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the zoo, and having a fine time at it"; she describes Hurst as "like a child at a circus" and a "run-away with no responsibilities" (737–38).

Hurston's attitude toward her eccentric boss is hard to pin down across these episodes. She seems simultaneously amused, chagrined, and a little envious of Hurst's ability to so fiercely pursue her whims. Hurston avoids explicitly judging Hurst's exploits—even the seemingly cruel prank that leaves Hurston waiting outside in the slush and snow with the wind "searching me like the police" (735) to deliver her galoshes while Hurst sneaks home. Hurston notes her physical experience of being cold and wet during this ostensibly callous ruse while occluding her emotional experience of it. Opting to play the analyst rather than the victim, she conjectures that Hurst's fits stem from her having been an only child in a wealthy household: "With the help of images, I could see that lonely child in a big house making up her own games. Being of artistic bent, I could see her making up characters to play with. Naturally she had to talk for her characters, or they would not say what she wanted them to" (734). Hurston goes on to generalize this imagined backstory before empathizing with it: "Most children play at that at times. I had done that extensively so I knew what she was doing when I saw her with the door half open, ringing her own doorbell and inviting herself to have some tea and muffins" (735). Although Hurston frames this chapter as reflecting on the women who have "meant a great deal to me in friendship and inward experience" (734), she reveals little of this inward experience to her readers, leaving open the possibility that her experiences of these relationships exceed the framework of friendship alone.

Hurston's relationship with Hurst is the least reciprocal of all of her encounters with white women in *Dust Tracks*. Unlike her experiences with the Minnesotans, with the white family for which she worked as a nanny, and with Miss M—, Hurston's escapades with Hurst are less than collaborative; Hurst doesn't so much play *with* Hurston as demand Hurston's participation in her privately conceived antics. At the same time, Hurston does not depict herself as merely being at the mercy of her boss's impulses, declaring the trip to Canada "exciting," for instance, while situating herself more as Hurst's bemused caretaker and begrudging companion than her suffering employee. Like her earlier experiences of romping, tussling, and staring both at and with her charges, we find Hurston relishing the moments—even discomfoting ones—when she is paid to do something other than clean, tend, or take dictation in the company of her employers. Eventually, Hurston relates to Hurst more like an artistic peer, noting their shared "bent" for the imaginary while

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drawing on her talents as both an ethnographer and a novelist to produce “images” of Hurst’s alleged childhood for the reader.

Hurston rarely encounters white women in *Dust Tracks* on a nontransactional basis. Almost all these relationships take place in the context of labor or patronage organized around preexisting structures of pink-collar labor—including hairdressing, nannying, nursing, and acting as a home secretary, work that Hurston repeatedly returned to through her life to make a living. Her choice to devote most of memoir to recounting the jobs she took when her writing, performing, and teaching failed to pay the bills is an argument in and of itself about the importance of these experiences to her understanding of the world around her. Hurston’s focus on pink-collar labor—jobs to which black women were largely relegated in the first half of the twentieth century—suggests her commitment to thinking through the structures of intimacy these laboring relationships produce as central to her work and thought rather than merely the means to this end. Her self-fashioning as a woman on the make in the city thus greatly diverges from the fictional female archetypes, both black and white, punctuating American modernism. Unlike Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie or Nella Larsen’s Helga Crane, Hurston does not rest her eyes on shop windows or pine for chic goods as she moves through urban space. Neither does Hurston portray herself in the naturalist model of Ann Petry’s Lutie Johnson, engaged in a bitter struggle to dwell in the city. If anything, Hurston anticipates a figure like Gwendolyn Brooks’s Maud Martha, observing the world around her, including relationships with white women, and recalling Hurston’s own eye for small detail and complex feeling.

But, of course, Maud Martha had not also traveled extensively, trained as an anthropologist, written several books, and met many of the most famous writers—black and white—of her time, accounting for much of the frustration readers have expressed with *Dust Tracks* since the 1970s. Hurston’s decision to forgo more detailed accounts of the economies and intimacies of her academic and writerly life to describe these comparatively minor and insignificant relationships continues to puzzle. But the combination of these encounters’ similar hierarchal power structure, coupled with the extraordinary acts and impasses punctuating these relationships, suggests Hurston’s interest in exploring both the possibilities and limits of what these forms of intimacies might achieve. Even as she describes the use-value these relationships held for her, she notes with equal persistence the uneven playing field organizing them. Hurston depicts these relationships as more than merely hierarchical while at the same time never losing sight of the labor roles structuring

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their intimacy. Even if, to draw from D. W. Winnicott's theory of play, Hurston is only a transitional object to the white women engaging with her in this fashion, these moments of play have a meaningful utility for Hurston.⁸ We could just as easily read the white women in *Dust Tracks*, from the Minnesotans to Hurst, as transitional objects for Hurston, allowing her to glimpse a life arranged around the privilege to initiate play enjoyed by her white employers. It is a tricky maneuver Hurston performs in these moments as she both endorses these acts of eruptive play with these women, throwing herself fully into their invitations, and never lets the reader lose sight of each scene's embeddedness within hierarchies of race and class that snap back into place once their eruptive play draws to a close. To read these moments as mere coercion in light of the power differential between Hurston and her white employers would require minimizing the pleasure Hurston herself derives from them; she admires the form of eruptive play on offer in these encounters, if not the distribution of its mechanics.

Unlike Walter Benjamin, who focuses on the distinctiveness of childhood as a period during which new relations with the object world beyond commodity relations can be explored, Hurston finds play capable of reorienting bodies at any age.⁹ But Hurston is also attentive to who has the privilege to initiate these acts of rupturing play and who does not. She uses these moments to marvel at the privilege of her white employers who can so easily forget their body while conscripting others to join them. Her white playmates' bodies are so deeply and comfortably anchored in spaces affirming their relative self-sovereignty—their play set within the private and domestic spaces her employers control if not outright own—that they can afford to play so hard they black out. Having not only a room of one's own but also laborers of one's own allows her white patrons and employers to use this hired other to imagine alternative ways of being *with* an other. Hurston recognizes both the fun and utility of the privileged play white women are free to initiate with her, and she eagerly participates in this play when invited. Yet we rarely see grown-up Hurston able to fulfill this type of playful suspension without figuring out a way to be paid for the privilege, either through her anthropological and stage work or her writing. In its repeated focus on these eruptive, confusing, and at times dissociative moments, Hurston's memoir suggests she does not so much long for a room of her own as the ability to *play on her own*, equalizing access to the "right" to leave the body in order to imagine different ways of being in relation to one's body and the bodies of others.

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Given that white women played such an outsized large role in Hurston's professional life—mediating her access to economic and intellectual resources—we might consider these encounters as primers in how Hurston lived with and through structures of inequality more broadly. In fact, the language of play, impasse, escape, and performance punctuating these earlier encounters returns toward the end of *Dust Tracks*, when Hurston describes her relationship to ideologies of politics and governance. Her publishers eventually cut this section from the book's first edition for its critical approach to US imperialism, fearing it was too controversial, given the country's imminent entry into the Second World War. Toward the end of this omitted section, since returned to the text in recent editions, Hurston details her relationship to the radical Left. Most of this passage involves repudiating a commitment to redistribution, insisting that rather than striking for "a little more stuffing in my bunk" she would rather get busy earning "the boss's bed" ([1942] 1995, 794). While Hurston continues on in this section to outline her dedication to "the idea of free vertical movement, nothing horizontal"—a statement often cited to buttress accounts of Hurston as a capitalist libertarian—the last paragraph of this discussion once more deploys the language of play, risk, and performance common to Hurston's description of her laboring and patronage relationships, leaving the door open for her participation in more revolutionary actions.

Hurston first insists that her commitment to a capitalist ethos of competition remains the same even if the system is rigged. In making this point, she analogizes the economic system to a card game, declaring her intention to keep playing even if the "whole system must be upset for me to win." "If others are in there," she continues, "deal me a hand and let me see what I can make of it, even though I know some in there are dealing from the bottom and cheating like hell in other ways. If I can win anything in a game like that, I know I'll end up with the pot if the sharks can be eliminated." Hurston's dedication to the economic game of capitalism recalls her description of her relationships with white women in which Hurston perpetually deals herself in to these intimacies to see what she "can make of it" despite knowing the cards are stacked against her. Her optimism is not unknowing or naive; it stems not from faith in the people or structures around her that she assumes do not operate to her advantage but from faith in her own indefatigability. We might think of her earlier moments of staring, dreaming, and playing while at work as Hurston's inventive efforts to show up and stay engaged in situations where she is unlikely to gain social or economic ground. And yet she

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describes herself as perpetually keeping her eyes trained on the bigger pot, willing to suffer loss after loss just to keep playing the game, to remain in the scene of passing where she cannot be fully eclipsed, to hold the national stage until the audience gives up and goes home. But Hurston quickly pivots from this playful scene of risk to sketch quite a different one, this time committing herself not to endurance but disruption. Upon declaring her devotion to the rigged game of capitalism, she abandons this metaphor in the middle of the paragraph to paint an alternative scene of participation, this time of a more radical bent:

If leaders on the left feel that only violence can right things, I see no need of finger-nail warfare. Why not take a stronger position? Shoot in the hearse, don't care how sad the funeral is. . . . Kill dead and go to jail. I am not bloodthirsty and have no yearning for strife, but if what they say is true, that there must be this upset, why not make it cosmic? A lot of people would join in for the drama of it, who would not be moved by guile.

A different tenor of disruption becomes key to Hurston's imagining the organization of the social here. While Hurston's descriptions of revolutionary violence have an edge of comic hyperbole ("shoot in the hearse, don't care how sad the funeral is"), she nonetheless suggests that despite having declared her commitment to playing the rigged game of capitalism, she would commit just as hard to the forceful takeover of economic systems. Whereas Hurston describes her playful interludes with her white female patrons without revealing her motives for engaging in this play beyond the sheer fun of it, here we find Hurston explicitly floating the idea that performative ruptures could lead to something more long-lasting: that just for "the drama of it" as opposed to any explicit, defined, articulated, or even conscious goal, she and others would "join in" and try on new strategies of organization—even deeply violent ones—with no guarantee of a better or worse politic as a result. For Hurston, it is not strife or raised consciousness that impels revolutionary actions but, rather, restlessness, boredom, and a desire for "drama." Across these scenarios, real and hypothetical, from the national stage to her boss's boudoir, Hurston commits herself to risking her body and its resources in the hope of finding herself elsewhere, on the other side.

Hurston's acts of encounter organized around a kind of rough and tumble dreaminess entail not necessarily growing closer with her co-conspirators but, rather, performing estrangement beside them. In both the multiple scenes of play between her and her white employers

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and patrons as well as in her more abstract nod to the possibility of a revolution fueled by a desire for “drama” rather than for concrete political ends, at *Dust Tracks*’ conclusion, Hurston imagines such performances to gather people who share if not a position than an orientation toward imagining ways of being elsewhere within the world. But whereas Hurston’s white co-conspirators imagine play to be only temporary and are always the ones to bring their romp to a close, she depicts herself as perpetually game to play deeper and longer, attempting to make these disruptions to the normal order of things last as long as she can. Play is a temporary escape for Hurston’s white associates; but it reemerges in the final passage as the means for initiating longer-lasting and potentially more violent forms of change for those who have no desire to return to things as they are when the moment has passed.

Scholars such as Hazel Carby and Walter Benn Michaels (1997) have charged Hurston with essentializing black racial identity, accusing her of remaining regressively “embedded in the politics of Negro identity,” as Carby puts it (1991, 79).¹⁰ And yet, throughout *Dust Tracks* Hurston persistently deemphasizes race and racism alike, choosing to prioritize her position as a laboring subject over other markers of identity. When she fleetingly entertains violent revolutionary action toward the book’s end, it is notably in the name of class politics as opposed to a civil rights practice anchored by race. I draw attention to this aspect of *Dust Tracks* not to discount these critiques of Hurston’s investment in racial identity but to suggest the difficulties of fixing Hurston’s political commitments or ideological priorities as stable or consistent across her long and erratic writing career. For instance, while Hurston explores the generative possibilities for interracial encounters between black and white women in *Dust Tracks*, twenty years later, she would argue for the utility of racial segregation in a 1955 letter to the *Orlando Sentinel* outlining her objections to the *Brown vs. Board* Supreme Court ruling. Her opposition to the decision derives as much from an interest in preserving forms of black pedagogy developed under conditions of constraint—a desire approximating the call for black studies made much later by Cedric Robinson, Adrian Piper, and Fred Moten—as from her more conservative distrust of the Supreme Court’s ruling as “Govt by fiat” ([1955] 1995, 957) with the power to “replace the Constitution” (958).¹¹

Attending to the methods and genres Hurston uses to arrive at her varying and, at times, competing ideologies allows us to see that her foremost commitments were not to outlining social or political platforms but to describing the strategies subjects developed to make their situations

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endurable. Whether these strategies prove sustainable or ultimately untenable, politically expedient or inevitably detrimental, matters less to Hurston in much of her work than understanding the immediate value these tactics held for those needing to get through the day. Her work is dedicated to extricating the forms of relationships, performances, and knowledges that emerge from even the most compromised and constrained conditions. I have tried to attend to Hurston's own output as invested in forms of resilience—if not exactly resistance—that privilege the performative and the provisional over coherence and staidness. To draw from Hurston's own account of her early disorienting experiences reading Greek myths and adventure stories in Eatonville as a young girl, giving ourselves over to both the joy and the “anguish” that comes with reading Hurston may be the first step toward encountering her work without aspiring to resolve it—reading, rather, for “the drama of it,” a motive that appears in her work to be capable of turning impracticable conditions into occasions for imagining their undoing.

§

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Notes

1. Hurston's essay first appeared in the Christian Socialist magazine the *World Tomorrow* in May 1928, while Virginia Woolf's extended essay, which began as a series of lectures delivered at Cambridge University in October 1928, was published in a revised and fuller form a year later in the United States and the United Kingdom simultaneously.
2. Alice Walker and Robert Hemenway were among the inaugural wave of scholars to reclaim Hurston as an important American writer and to dismiss *Dust Tracks* as a nadir within her oeuvre. Pierre Walker (1998) nicely recounts the critical blowback *Dust Tracks* has weathered across the decades. But even the latest generation of scholars of *Dust Tracks*, such as Pierre Walker and Tanya Kam in her article “Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails: The Body Speaks Resistance in *Dust Tracks on a Road*” (2009), still look to recuperate Hurston's memoir from decades of insults within the same framework as earlier criticism, arguing for *Dust Tracks*' utility in the name of subversion and resistance. For Walker, *Dust Tracks* “resists reduction” of the self “to a coherent, consistent unity” (1998, 388), while Kam argues that the text “subverts social structures

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and norms even as it seems to project a friction-less portrait of black-white relations" (2009, 74). I am less interested in excavating a positive politics in *Dust Tracks* than in looking to newly define the ground for finding politics within the text in the first place. In my interest in the book's form, I share affinities with Françoise Lionnet's chapter on Hurston in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, which explores the book as "autoethnography" (1991, 99), and with Judith Robey's (1990) interest in the text in terms of genre. Moreover, while Walker recovers *Dust Tracks* on the grounds of postmodern techniques of play and an interest in the instability of the self, I see Hurston's text not in opposition to a modernist canon but rather as belonging to a type of modernist aesthetics that emerges only when placed in conversation with this larger cohort of modernist women writers.

3. My use of the word *encounter* here is informed by Sharon Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism*, in which she argues that contemporary longings for a postracial society have been fueled by "the fervent desire to move beyond an encounter" with race so as to more quickly and painlessly inhabit a deracinated present, effectively deferring an encounter with race from actually taking place (2012, 18). For Holland, to desire the postracial, which is generally figured as respite beyond an encounter with race, is to desire a nonrelation with racial others premised on old scripts of repression and avoidance rather than on a reconception of such alliances in real time and space.

4. Judith Robey (1990) tracks the genres Hurston uses in *Dust Tracks*—myth, the picaresque, and the essay.

5. This claim originates with Robert Hemenway, who wrote that *Dust Tracks* was "apparently written self-consciously with a white audience in mind," and Alice Walker, who finds *Dust Tracks*' problems to be due to be "a result of dependency, a sign of her powerlessness, her inability to pay back her debts with anything but words" (quoted in Wallach 2010, 73–74).

6. For instance, Hurston describes a fictional dialogue between herself and a hypothetical male "descendant of a slave owner" in *Dust Tracks* to demonstrate the "futility" of dwelling upon the "dark days of slavery and Reconstruction" ([1955] 1995, 766).

7. Hurston's encounters with white women were not limited to those detailed in her memoir. In addition to her patronage relationships with Charlotte Osgood Mason, which she does describe in some detail in *Dust Tracks*, and Annie Nathan Meyer, Hurston also worked with anthropologists Jane Belo and Katharine Edson Mershon, with whom Hurston stayed in California while completing her memoir. While Hurston's account of her "curious" relations with Mason has its oddities—take, for instance, her insistence that Mason could read her mind from "thousands of miles away" (688)—there is not the

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same level of play, roughhousing, or reciprocal pleasure as Hurston details in her other encounters with white female patrons or employers. In fact Hurston devotes equal time in her memoir, and often much more, to narrating her encounters with the women I feature here, despite the relative longevity and greater significance of her relationship with Mason.

8. The insights of both Winnicott and Hurston emerge at midcentury. Perhaps this interest in play is symptomatic of a larger late-Modernist interest in the theme. Or we could connect Winnicott as child analyst and Hurston as child-care provider and anthropologist as professionally linked to the observation of children and cultures of play broadly conceived; my hunch is to tentatively endorse the latter claim (see Winnicott 2005).

9. See Benjamin 1979, 68–69. My reading of Benjamin on play is deeply indebted to Susan Buck-Morss (1993, 309–38).

10. See Carby 1991, 71–94, and Walter Benn Michaels's argument that Hurston, in transforming "folk culture into racial heritage" deployed "racial identity as a category through which class difference can be articulated and by which class difference can be subsumed" (1997, 87–94).

11. For more on black studies, see Moten 2008, 1743–47, and Ferguson 2012.

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True Lies: Virginia Woolf, Espionage, and Feminist Agency

Mark David Kaufman

Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping.

—Virginia Woolf (1929)

Secrecy is essential. (1938)

In the graphic novel *Black Dossier* (2007), the third volume in Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* series, Allan Quatermain and Mina Harker traverse an Orwellian, midcentury Britain in quest of a top-secret file containing a history of the "league," a secret service composed entirely of characters from literature. Essentially, the dossier represents a sourcebook for the series, complete with accounts of earlier members of the illustrious group dating back to the Renaissance. The centerpiece of the collection, "The Life of Orlando," traces Virginia Woolf's immortal, gender-bending hero(ine) through centuries of outlandish adventures. We learn, for instance, of Orlando's birth in Bronze Age Greece to the blind seer Tiresias, and we follow along as (s)he fights in the Trojan War, campaigns with Alexander the Great, serves as a Roman legionnaire, joins the Crusades, helps to found the first Elizabethan spy network, takes part in the French Revolution, and, finally, assists Quatermain and Harker in thwarting a plot against King George V at his coronation in 1910. The narrative ends in 1943, with the three-thousand-year-old Orlando listening to the air-raid sirens over London and reflecting on the "pointless wars" (2007, n.p.) and perpetual conflicts of human history.

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Like most steampunk narratives, *Black Dossier* draws heavily from late-Victorian and Edwardian popular literature in constructing its pseudohistory of Britain. However, as the inclusion of Orlando indicates, steampunk also has a way of mining modernism for source material, often commandeering the most unlikely protagonists and tasking them with the defense of the realm. Like Moore and O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Kim Newman's successful *Anno Dracula* series of novels incorporates a surprising range of characters from modern literature—Oscar Wilde's Basil Hallward, George Bernard Shaw's Mrs. Warren, E. M. Forster's Henry Wilcox, and D. H. Lawrence's Clifford Chatterley, to name a few. In pitting these characters against the likes of Count Dracula, Professor Moriarty, and Dr. Fu Manchu, steampunk approaches the problematic of modernism's political valence in an oblique but creative way. On the one hand, it is possible to read these fictions as lending to "high modernism" a sense of social responsibility that many commentators, following György Lukács, find lacking. On the other hand, perhaps steampunk merely emphasizes what is already there; even the most outrageous narratives sometimes contain a modicum of truth, an implied reading or uncovering of modernism's potential to intervene in world affairs. While Moore and O'Neill's treatment of Orlando in *League* bears little resemblance to Woolf's 1928 novel, their enlistment of Orlando calls to mind the author's famous observation in her diary that she and her sister, Vanessa, formed a "league together against the world" (1982, 118), a comment anticipating the alliance of politically engaged women that she advocates in *Three Guineas* (1938). Similarly, the Woolf of "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940), like the Orlando of *Black Dossier*, views all history as a continuous tragedy, one in which individuals should intervene not by taking up arms but by fighting "with the mind" ([1940] 1942, 244).

Steampunk is not the only genre to "recruit" modernism into the world of the thriller; the parallel genre of speculative biographical fiction engages in a similar operation but with a certain measure of realism. There are, in fact, two different spy novels in which Virginia Woolf herself serves as the heroic protagonist. The first, Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth: A Novel of Espionage with Virginia Woolf* (1983), follows the "unlikely sleuth" as she works in parallel with the Security Service (MI5) to thwart a conspiracy to leak British military plans to the Germans in 1917, an investigation that leads her into an underworld of agents and

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double agents, where books are used as secret codes and bookstores serve as fronts for shadowy cabals. The second, Stephanie Barron's *The White Garden: A Novel of Virginia Woolf* (2009), pits Woolf against the notorious Cambridge Spy Ring during the Second World War. More specifically, she uncovers a Bloomsbury plot to warn Stalin about Hitler's imminent invasion of the USSR, a scheme that involves encoding secret messages in the manuscript of *Between the Acts*. This discovery ultimately leads to her death—not by suicide but at the hands of sinister forces. Like *Shadow*, *White Garden* places the writer in opposition to a traitorous conspiracy involving the upper echelons of British society itself.

In spite or because of their sensationalism, these novels raise an intriguing question: can we take them *seriously*? In other words, is it possible to read *Shadow* and *White Garden* as informed treatments of Woolf? Or, is the presence of “Virginia Woolf” in these spy yarns a mere novelty, an imaginative conscription that has little or nothing to do with the *real* Virginia Woolf? To be fair, neither book offers itself as a genuine conspiracy theory or as a truthful representation of Woolf's life. Each begins with the customary disclaimer against confusing fantasy with reality. Hawkes and Manso's “Author's Note” states that the book “is a novel, and while Virginia Woolf and a number of her contemporaries appear side by side with fictional characters, the scenes in which we have placed them, as well as their dialogue, thoughts, and actions, are our own invention and should not be construed as historical fact” ([1983] 1984, n.p.). Likewise, Barron asserts that references to real people and places “are intended only to give the fiction a setting in historical reality” (2009, n.p.). Both books are, in short, what Graham Greene calls “entertainments.”¹ However, I want to suggest that, instead of rationalizing our dismissal, the pulp status of these novels justifies a uniquely Woolfian reading. Indeed, Woolf herself took an interest in what her biographer Hermione Lee labels “trashy novels” (1997, 408). In “Bad Writers” Woolf recognizes the “quality of unfettered imagination” that can only be found in popular fiction: “The bad writer seems to possess a predominance of the day-dreaming power, he lives all day long in that region of artificial light where every factory girl becomes a duchess, where, if truth be told, most people spend a few moments every day revenging themselves upon reality. The bad books are not the mirrors but the vast distorted shadows of life; they are a refuge, a form of revenge” ([1918] 1987, 328). In locating the agency of popular writing in its power to enact “revenge,” Woolf

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draws our attention to fantasy's ability to imaginatively redress or intervene in (historical) reality. As "the vast distorted shadows of life," such texts shelter, Woolf implies, a kernel of truth, albeit in disguise.

Speculative fictions that revenge themselves upon historical and biographical archives, *Shadow* and *White Garden* correlate with Woolf's own interest in counterfactual inquiries. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf begins her treatise by paradoxically emphasizing its unreality. That is, Woolf freely admits that the places she mentions have "no existence," that her "I" is but "a convenient term for somebody who has no real being," and that her evidence is compounded of "lies" ([1929] 2007, 3). Most famously, Woolf offers an account of "Judith Shakespeare," William's (nonexistent) sister, as a means of illustrating the economic and social factors that serve as the preconditions for literary production. In doing so, Woolf approaches the topic of "women and fiction" through the agency of fictional women, whom she juxtaposes with historical female authors—in particular, the seventeenth-century playwright, novelist, adventurer, and (appropriately enough) former spy, Aphra Behn. Woolf's rationale behind this unorthodox approach has much to do with the discursive and archival conditions of knowledge itself. Throughout *Room*, the author consults various institutions and authorities—"Oxbridge," the British Museum, and the library—in quest of a useful "truth" or an "authentic fact" (44) about women. Unable to find a satisfactory account, Woolf discovers that the very categories of facticity, authenticity, and truthfulness are themselves historically and rhetorically gendered. Ironically praising "man's writing" as "direct" and "straightforward" (109), the author suggests that a new conception of truth calls for a new medium, one employing tactics that are circuitous, oblique, and perhaps—like Behn herself—a bit "shady" (71). Both *A Room of One's Own* and its counterpart, *Orlando*, imply that Woolf's experimental fiction is also, in a sense, a new history of women. As such, Woolf's feminist texts dispute the myth that modernism is primarily invested in formalism or "art for art's sake." Far from being politically disinterested, Woolf develops a unique politics of form that troubles the fact-fiction dichotomy. From this perspective, *Shadow* and *White Garden*, while not exactly experimental, may be said to participate in a similar project: critically redressing memory through a narrative that trades on true lies.

To put it another way, these novels do not impose the world of the thriller onto Woolf; rather, they draw out and allegorize a *spy-function* that is already present in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. Recent studies of spy

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literature, such as Oliver Buckton's comprehensive *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900: The Changing Enemy* (2015), tend to focus on espionage as a popular genre rather than as a literary mode open to writers who fall outside of the category of "spy novelists." Others, such as Allan Hepburn's *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005) and Erin Carlston's *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens* (2013), theorize a larger relationship between modernism and espionage, but they make little or no mention of Woolf, focusing instead on Marcel Proust, W. H. Auden, and other writers who take spying as a master metaphor for political and sexual alienation. In Woolf, we find a similar desire to play spy but one that moves beyond figurative associations to embrace a more performative (if hypothetical) dimension of espionage.

In what follows, I will begin by suggesting that what Lee describes as Woolf's attentiveness to "the relationship . . . between public and private, official and secret lives" (1997, 12), is not limited to her theory of biographical inquiry but characterizes her aesthetic and political outlook as a whole. Alice Wood, in her genetic study of Woolf's late writing, cautions against adopting the perspective that Woolf's work (and modernism in general) evolves in two separate phases: the aesthetically radical 1920s and the politically engaged 1930s; instead, Wood sees "Woolf's late cultural criticism as an extension of, rather than a departure from, the innovative feminist politics and aesthetic experimentation of her earlier writing" (2013, 4). In a similar vein, my goal is to show how the spy-function unites seemingly disparate aspects of Woolf's oeuvre. In a famous passage from *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe sits at the feet of Mrs. Ramsay and ruminates on the constitutive secret that animates personality: "[She] imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers?" (Woolf [1927] 1955, 79). This "art," which takes as its subject the undisclosed and ciphered domain, meets truth "half way" (78), yet it is able to accommodate a multiplicity of identities—or what Orlando's biographer calls a "variety of selves" (Woolf [1928] 2006, 226)—obscured by public facts and figures. Woolf reminds us that stream-of-consciousness writing is itself an aesthetic of disclosure. Moving from the realm of art to the field of action, I will then discuss the way Woolf, in *Three Guineas*,

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figures feminism as a veritable spy ring, an “Outsider’s Society” that, while resolutely nationless, nevertheless operates from within social, cultural, and political spheres, and whose messages emerge through forms of public discourse, “sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them” ([1938] 2006, 136). Unlike conventional spies, Woolf’s outsider is not, therefore, an agent of the state; on the contrary, her agency—her capacity to exert power and influence events—works in opposition to state-sponsored injustice. In her political writings on the eve of the Second World War, Woolf anticipates our current concerns over governmental and institutional transparency, stressing the need to expose what she considers to be the authoritarian regime at home: the academic, military, religious, and professional “procession” that privileges secrecy and violence. Woolf’s strategy, in effect, is to adopt a conspiracy of her own.

But, as in any good thriller, there is a final twist to the plot. Turning to *Shadow* and *White Garden*, I will consider the manner in which these Cold War and post-Cold War novels not only reflect but also appropriate Woolf’s outsider position for their own purposes. Both Ellen Hawkes, a feminist scholar invested in asserting the writer’s independence from the controlling Leonard Woolf, and Stephanie Barron, a former CIA analyst weaving a tale of Soviet incursions into Britain’s intellectual elite, succeed in imaginatively turning Woolf against her own avant-garde circle, enlisting the author in a rearguard action that is more a critique of liberalism than of fascism. That is, while allegorizing the Woolfian spy-function, both “entertainments” carry out a retroactive interrogation of Bloomsbury itself—which has always seemed, to suspicious observers, “a coterie conspiracy” (Lee 1997, 263).

Strangers on a train

A committed pacifist, Virginia Woolf hardly seems, at first glance, a likely candidate for espionage, fictional or otherwise. As Lee illustrates, Woolf’s life was not particularly “sensational”:

She did not go to school. She did not work in an office. She did not belong to any institution. With rare exceptions, she did not give public lectures or join committees or give interviews. And in private terms her life-story is sensational only for her breakdowns and suicide attempts. She did not have children. Her sexual life, though unusual, was not dramatic or notorious. She

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was not the subject of any public scandals or law cases. She did not engage in any hazardous sports or bizarre hobbies. She never flew in an aeroplane, or travelled outside Europe. Her exploits and adventures are in her mind and on the page. And here too, in her writing life, she is intensely private. (1997, 16)

Lee's synopsis manages to capture the general image that we have of the historical Woolf, but with one significant exception, a daring act that informs the author's work and helps to frame her conception of political engagement.

On February 7, 1910, Admiral William May of the British Royal Navy received a telegram from the Foreign Office instructing him to expect a delegation of "Abyssinian" (i.e., Ethiopian) princes who wished to inspect HMS *Dreadnought*, then flagship of the Royal Navy. When the delegation arrived in due course, Admiral May and Commander William Fisher rolled out the red carpet and ordered a naval band to play the anthem of Zanzibar (since the Abyssinian national anthem was unavailable). The officers then proceeded to show the dignitaries around the battleship, including its state-of-the-art—and highly secret—wireless system. After a pleasant visit, Admiral May and Commander Fisher escorted the royal party off the ship and cheerfully sent them on their way. All in all, it seemed a successful diplomatic encounter. The only problem was that the Abyssinians were not Abyssinians at all but a young Virginia Stephen (dressed as a man), her brother Adrian, and other friends wearing elaborate costumes and speaking in a tongue of their own devising.

The *Dreadnought* Hoax, as it quickly came to be known, is one of the more colorful incidents in Woolf's life. In a speech delivered to the Rodmell Women's Institute in 1940, Woolf describes how Adrian's friend Horace Cole ("the ring leader") and their fellow "conspirators" planned the escapade, arranged for the bogus telegram to be sent, and generally told "a variety of lies" to cover their tracks ([1940] 2008, 186). Their disguises were evidently quite good; even Fisher, who happened to be Virginia and Adrian's cousin, failed to see through the deception. Nevertheless, Woolf's account of the tour reads like a slapstick sketch, with the party constantly on the verge of exposure. Upon their arrival, the navy informed the delegation that they had an Abyssinian speaker on board—who just happened to be on leave that day. Climbing up a mast to view the wireless equipment, Virginia's beard nearly blew off in the breeze.

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Invited to view the officers' bathrooms, she feared that the plot had been discovered and that the sailors would "give us each a good ducking" (192) before throwing the party overboard. Despite these close calls, the British navy fell for the ruse—hook, line, and sinker. In fact, the officers were so friendly that Virginia began to feel "slightly ashamed" (193).

A few days later, official tempers flared when Cole, who considered the hoax a "work of art," proudly informed the London papers of what had transpired, much to Virginia's horror. As she recalls, there were those in the government for whom the incident represented a significant breach of national security:

Some member of Parliament had seen the *Daily Mirror*—indeed the story had been in all the papers; and he got up and asked whether his Majesty's government were aware that a party of irresponsible and foolish people had dressed themselves up as Abyssinians and gone on board the *Dreadnought*. There were roars of laughter. But the speaker went on to point out that it was a very serious matter. He said that it reflected upon the credit of the navy. He said that it showed that anybody however foolish had only to send a forged telegram and he would take in the Admiral of the Channel Fleet. He said that we might have been German spies. He said that we had been shown secret instruments. . . . And he asked finally that steps should be taken to deal with us. ([1940] 2008, 196–97)

Luckily for the hoaxers, the 1911 Official Secrets Act did not yet exist. If it had, the "conspirators" could have been charged with a felony and sent to prison for entering an unauthorized zone. Indeed, it is wholly possible that the *Dreadnought* Hoax cast a shadow, the following year, over the drafting of the act itself, which designates a "prohibited place" as "any work of defence, arsenal, factory, dockyard, camp, ship, telegraph or signal station, or office belonging to His Majesty."² If so, then it would not be too much of an exaggeration to argue that Virginia Woolf played a small part in the creation of the modern security state. But we need not make so bold a claim in order to examine the significance of the hoax in Woolf's evolving conception of feminist agency.

That Woolf chose the *Dreadnought* incident as the subject for her 1940 talk—when she had, in fact, been asked to "speak about books" (Johnston 2009, 2)—suggests that she felt the hoax was in some way linked to her creative life and work. In the speech, "which made her

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audience laugh themselves silly” (Lee 1997, 722), Woolf narrates how she and her companions got the better of the military and made them look ridiculous. Consequently, Woolf’s commentators regard the hoax as an early manifestation of her antiauthoritarian politics. Phyllis Rose describes it as “a primal event, the acting out of her own rebellion against paternal authority” (quoted in Kennard 1996, 151). Her problematic use of blackface has been viewed by Kathy J. Phillips and others as a gesture of solidarity with oppressed races, a sympathetic move that she repeats in her political writing by identifying the plight of women with that of the colonized (see Kennard 1996, 151). Additionally, the fact that Woolf dressed as a man has led some critics, such as Jean Kennard, to theorize the ways in which “cross-dressing . . . has the effect of carnivalizing political and cultural power and thus of undermining it” (152), an effect that would become central to *Orlando*.

Critics have neglected, however, to treat the hoax as a literal act of espionage that anticipates the figural spying we find throughout Woolf’s work. Although Woolf was the only female member of the party, her description of the hoaxers as “conspirators” is noteworthy given the word’s gendered connotation in her oeuvre. Appearing with surprising frequency and usually signifying a bond between women, the trope of “conspiracy” imparts a subversive tenor to the Woolfian “league . . . against the world” (1982, 118). In the draft of her memoir, “Sketch of the Past,” which Woolf worked on in the last years of her life, she observes that, as children, she and Vanessa “formed together a very close conspiracy. In that world of many men, coming and going, we formed our private nucleus” ([1939] 1976, 123). This early “conspiracy” correlates not only with the hoax but also with the secret societies and scenes of intrigue that inform Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction. “Her books,” Lee writes, “are full of images of war: armies, battles, guns, bombs, air-raids, battleships, shell-shock victims, war reports, photographs of war victims, voices of dictators” (1997, 336). Lee should have added “spies,” for Woolf consistently employs the imagery of espionage to figure not only her feminism but also her approach to writing. This embrace of clandestinity—an embrace that is itself a form of cross-dressing, of inhabiting the male-dominated world of conspiracies and secret agents—allows Woolf to develop a conception of both literary and political activity as a form of infiltration, whose ultimate goal is the sabotaging of the patriarchal “procession” by taking the wind out of its sails, so to speak.

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Woolf's first literary representation of espionage comes in her 1921 short story collection, *Monday or Tuesday*. Two stories in particular, "A Society" and "An Unwritten Novel," embody, respectively, the political and aesthetic dimensions of spying that become more intertwined in Woolf's later work. As commentators have observed, "A Society" makes direct use of the *Dreadnought* Hoax, and it also gestures toward the "society" of female outsiders that Woolf would elaborate in *Three Guineas*. In the story, a group of young women take it upon themselves to "[judge] the results" of centuries of patriarchal rule by surreptitiously entering various male-dominated institutions, gathering intelligence, and reporting back to the group: "[We] made ourselves into a society for asking questions. One of us was to visit a man-of-war; another was to hide herself in a scholar's study; another was to attend a meeting of business men; while all were to read books, look at pictures, go to concerts, keep our eyes open in the streets, and ask questions perpetually" (1985, 119). As in her political writings, Woolf's primary targets are the military, the university, the church, and the professions, organizations with the ostensible goal of producing "good people" and making the world a safer and more productive place. More often than not, the spy ring discovers that these institutions are primarily concerned with maintaining power by reinforcing a particular image of themselves. In order to investigate the nature of gentlemanly honor, one of the members, Rose, dons the garb of "an Aethiopian Prince" and visits "one of His Majesty's Ships" (120). Upon discovering the deception, the captain seeks out the woman, who is "now disguised as a private gentleman" and demands "that honour should be satisfied." After trading symbolic strokes with a cane, the two retire to a restaurant, get drunk, and "[part] with protestations of eternal friendship" (121). Honor, Woolf suggests, is only a matter of surface formality. The other members of the ring have similarly disheartening experiences, coming to the conclusion that duty and glory are also empty concepts, mere ciphers for the truly important things in life: "aeroplanes, factories, and money" (125). The society concludes, finally, that there is only one thing left for an intelligent woman to believe in, "and that is herself" (130).

While "A Society" introduces the idea of a secret cabal of women who penetrate the strongholds of male power, Woolf's story "An Unwritten Novel" indicates that the role of the female artist, in particular, is also to surveil other women in an effort to reveal their hidden lives and thereby achieve a more naturalistic expression of character. As the title suggests, this story works as a kind of prospectus, a novel in miniature

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that is also an implicit manifesto of the novelist's art. On a train "[rattling] through Surrey and across the border into Sussex" (1985, 107), an unnamed narrator quietly scrutinizes the woman opposite, attempting to reconstruct her story based upon her behavior and appearance in a manner not unlike that of Sherlock Holmes. Noting the particular "venom" with which the woman mentions her sister-in-law and imagining possible family dramas, the narrator believes she has cracked the woman's code: "Leaning back in my corner, shielding my eyes from her eyes, seeing only the slopes and hollows, greys and purples, of the winter's landscape, I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze" (108). The narrator constructs a complex but fragmentary world for the woman, dubbing her "Minnie Marsh." While doing so, however, she senses that there is always something of the other that is withheld or indecipherable. "Have I read you right?" the narrator wonders. "[Now] you lay across your knees a pocket-handkerchief into which drop little angular fragments of eggshell—fragments of a map—a puzzle. I wish I could piece them together!" (111). Silently observing this stranger, the narrator contemplates the notion of identity in general—the "life, soul, spirit, whatever you are of Minnie Marsh"—and the means through which the artist communicates personality. Minnie herself is ultimately one of many "unknown figures" who populate the writer's world and become subjects of writerly surveillance. "Wherever I go," the narrator thinks, "mysterious figures, I see you, turning the corner. . . . I hasten, I follow" (115).

As Lee points out, "An Unwritten Novel" parodies the sort of "first-class railway carriage" novels that Woolf associated with Edwardian fiction (1997, 400). It is also the story, Lee contends, that "turned Virginia Woolf into a modernist" (401); coming between *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922), "An Unwritten Novel" develops the interior monologue, employing it to create a "female narrative." If so, the story also illustrates that Woolf's modernism takes as one of its governing metaphors the scene of intrigue—here, a loaded encounter between strangers on a train, a scene familiar to readers of that other Edwardian genre, the spy yarn. Although the intervention of the Great War may have signaled the belated demise of Edwardian culture, thereby moving prewar England into the realm of melancholic parody, the tropes of espionage emerge from the crucible of war as a newborn culture of intrigue. Significantly, Woolf's unnamed narrator begins the story reading in her newspaper about the Paris Peace Conference, only to engage in her own covert, peacetime

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surveillance. Such operations, the story implies, persist in the postwar era; in spite of the armistice, the narrator traverses a world of borders, a world permeated by the rhetoric of secrecy and encryption, of figures to be followed and messages to be “deciphered.”

In her fiction from the early 1920s, Woolf draws correlations between reading, writing, and spying. In her later nonfiction, she merges the qualities of “A Society” and “An Unwritten Novel”—the interrogation of patriarchal institutions and the revelation of hidden lives—into a common political aesthetic, a modernist method focused not on the verification of individual identities but on disrupting traditional loyalties and transforming narrative techniques through a distinctly female intelligence. As in her experimental fiction, the encounter between strangers on a train serves as the narrative basis for one of Woolf’s most famous essays on modern literature and method, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924). Contrasting the “Edwardians” (H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy) with the “Georgians” (E.M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, and, by implication, herself), Woolf points out the limitations of the former in treating “character in itself” ([1924] 1966, 327). To do so, she once again describes a train journey, this time from Richmond to Waterloo:

One night some weeks ago . . . I was late for the train and jumped into the first carriage I came to. As I sat down I had the strange and uncomfortable feeling that I was interrupting a conversation between two people who were already sitting there. . . . They were both elderly, the woman over sixty, the man well over forty. They were sitting opposite each other, and the man, who had been leaning over and talking emphatically to judge by his attitude and the flush on his face, sat back and became silent. I had disturbed him, and he was annoyed. The elderly lady, however, whom I will call Mrs. Brown, seemed rather relieved. . . . There was something pinched about her—a look of suffering, of apprehension, and, in addition, she was extremely small. . . . I felt she had nobody to support her; that she had to make up her mind for herself; that, having been deserted, or left a widow, years ago, she had led an anxious, harried life, bringing up an only son, perhaps, who, as likely as not, was by this time beginning to go to the bad. All this shot through my mind as I sat down, being uncomfortable, like most people, at travelling with fellow passengers unless I have somehow or other accounted for them. (321–22)

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Woolf indicates that the situation smacks of intrigue, perhaps of crime. "Obviously," she thinks, the man "had an unpleasant business to settle with Mrs. Brown; a secret, perhaps sinister business, which they did not intend to discuss in my presence" (322). After her entrance, the couple continues speaking in a kind of code, a forced conversation concerning mutual acquaintances. But Woolf's interruption has disturbed the power relation between the two. In a sense, her desire to read or narrate "Mrs. Brown" also serves to temporarily dislodge the man's hold over the woman, a hold that she then correlates with the male writerly gaze.

Woolf's purpose is to demonstrate that each of her Edwardian colleagues—Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy—would interpret the situation in his own way. Wells would scarcely take notice of the woman, for there are "no Mrs. Browns in Utopia" (327). Galsworthy would see only a manifestation of factories and social injustice, Mrs. Brown as "a pot broken on the wheel and thrown into the corner" (328). Bennett would notice every detail of the woman and then offer endless descriptions with little insight. For Woolf, though, Mrs. Brown is the "thing itself." Once the suspicious man leaves and the two women are left alone, Woolf projects her "fantastic and secluded life" (324), surrounded by sea-urchins, ships in bottles, and her dead husband's medals. "The important thing," Woolf insists, "was to realize her character, to steep oneself in her atmosphere. I had no time to explain why I felt it somewhat tragic, heroic, yet with a dash of the flighty, and fantastic, before the train stopped, and I watched her disappear, carrying her bag, into the vast blazing station." "The story ends," Woolf writes, "without any point to it." We never learn the "secret" of Mrs. Brown, but we are given to understand that a prewar aesthetic is insufficient. If Mrs. Brown is to be "rescued," it must be through the "smashing and crashing" of old forms and conventions: "Thus it is that we hear all round us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays, the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction. It is the prevailing sound of the Georgian age" (333–34). Woolf establishes a connection between politics and narrative, arguing that experimental forms, though often "failures and fragments" (335), have the best chance of liberating both women and women's writing from what she designates in "An Unwritten Novel" as "the man's way" (1985, 113).

In her short stories and essays, Woolf's campaign against patriarchal authority thus involves two interrelated strategies. First, she exposes and deconstructs what she considers to be the strongholds of power: the university, the church, the military, the government, and the professional

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sphere. Second, she focuses on reading and writing the lives of women as integral to the first—not just the lives of the famous but also those of the unknown and even the nonexistent. For Woolf, the biography—or, more specifically, the *fictional* biography—is a privileged form of knowledge. As the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and as a good friend of the iconoclastic biographer Lytton Strachey, author of the ironically titled *Eminent Victorians* (1918), Woolf was well aware that “life writing” could both reinforce and resist nationalist ideologies. But her investment in biographical inquiry is unique, I would emphasize, in its manipulation of counterfactuality. It is not important, Woolf insists, that we believe the subject is “real,” that we know the “truth” of Mrs. Brown; what is important is that, through our idea of her, we approach the essence or “atmosphere” of the “thing in itself” that is irreducible to facts, dates, and numbers. Arnold Bennett, who observes “every detail with immense care” and provides “facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines” (Woolf [1924] 1966, 328, 330), never really sees Mrs. Brown. A device of Edwardian realism, the accumulation of data is likewise a means of establishing and maintaining power, a method of bureaucracies and professions. Woolf’s response is to represent women’s lives without reducing them to a collection of figures.

For Woolf, such aesthetic choices have political consequences. Throughout her work in the 1920s, she continually emphasizes that the contemplative, literary study of personality—the cultivation of sympathy—has the potential to disrupt the machinations of power. In *Jacob’s Room*, the narrator observes that “men in clubs and Cabinets,” representatives of both social and political spheres, “say that character-drawing is a frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls” (Woolf [1922] 2008, 216). When the “battleships ray out over the North Sea” and “blocks of tin soldiers” invade foreign fields, when these “actions, together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancellories, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward,” what use is literature in the face of such “an unseizable force” (217)? The answer, she suggests, is that sympathy—which is, for Woolf, a form of conspiracy—works against the false “loyalties” that drive both department stores and dreadnoughts. But literature is not the only weapon at hand; Woolf also advocates a more dynamic approach, a vision of the engaged feminist agent who is, in her own way, dangerous to authority.

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Femme fatale

In the first chapter of *The Years*, the ten-year-old Rose Pargiter has something of a late-night “adventure” (Woolf 1937, 26). Stealing her nurse’s latchkey, she sneaks out of the family house in Kensington (where Woolf herself grew up) to visit Lamley’s toy shop. Along the way, she imagines herself “riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison”: “She had a secret message—she clenched her fist on her purse—to deliver to the General in person. All their lives depended upon it. The British flag was still flying on the central tower—Lamley’s shop was the central tower; the General was standing on the roof of Lamley’s shop with his telescope to his eye. All their lives depended upon her riding to them through the enemy’s country” (27). Drawing from what Rudolf Glitz identifies as iconic images of “military Victorianism” (2005, 15)—the Indian Mutiny, the fall of Khartoum, and the Charge of the Light Brigade—the child reenacts the martial and imperialist escapades romanticized in popular culture. However, Rose’s fantasy abruptly ends when she encounters a strange man on Melrose Avenue, a flasher who makes sucking noises and proceeds to “[unbutton] his clothes” (Woolf 1937, 29). Terrified, she flees, imagining as she does the sound of “his feet padding on the pavement” behind her. Whether or not this incident exerts an influence on Rose’s troubled adulthood—her violent and suicidal tendencies—this short scene treats, in a complex way, the position of the female subject within the patriarchal order. On the one hand, as Glitz points out, the fantasy alludes “to cases of male imperialists falling victim to the very power structures they helped to defend” (2005, 15). On the other hand, in emulating these lionized shades of imperial sacrifice, Rose is brutally reminded of her own outsiderism, her subjection to a power structure marked by exhibitionism and sexual aggression. As the narrative portion of Woolf’s projected “novel-essay” *The Pargiters*, *The Years* dramatizes the critique of patriarchy that Woolf develops in her polemical treatise, *Three Guineas* (1938). But while the knife-brandishing, brick-throwing Rose Pargiter represents one type of feminist agitator, Woolf’s book-length essay endorses a more peaceful, but still forceful, mode of opposition to authority. Like Orlando, whom we initially find chopping away at the mummified head of a Moor, full of quixotic longings for conquest and glory, and who finally chooses a life of critical inquiry, the transition from the militant Rose to the anonymous subjects of *Three Guineas* characterizes Woolf’s conception of

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how contemplative, literate women may make a difference in “the world outside” (quoted in Lee 1997, 610) without resorting to physical violence.

While Woolf’s first book-length essay, *A Room of One’s Own*, focuses on the role of the female artist, *Three Guineas* more ambitiously takes on the social and political agency of women in general, particularly at a time of escalating international conflict. In doing so, Woolf’s later treatise draws together and develops the various aspects of the spy-function that emerge in her earlier stories, novels, and essays—her critique of militarism, her concept of the secret society of women, and her emphasis on biographical investigation as a means of establishing a feminist counternarrative—while presenting them for the first time in the form of an imperative, a call to action. The primary targets of Woolf’s critical project in *Three Guineas* are what she calls the “unreal loyalties” ([1938] 2006, 95) fostered by various institutions. For Woolf, these “processions” may take any number of forms, from the parading of the military to the solemn splendor of the academic ceremony, to the pomp and pageantry of imperialist display—in short, any institution that renders competition, conquest, and warfare as honorable and beautiful pursuits. Although primarily concerned with women, Woolf declares that all people should aim to free themselves from these ideological constraints: “By freedom from unreal loyalties is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring from them” (97). The “real loyalties,” for Woolf, are “the full development of body and mind.”

Structurally, *Three Guineas* appropriates key qualities of the elitist and esoteric “procession”—its secrecy and invasiveness—and turns them against authority. Taking the form of three letters in which Woolf responds to questions posed by various societies seeking donations (hence the guineas), the text positions the reader as a kind of eavesdropper. To put it another way, in *Three Guineas* reading is indistinguishable from perustration, the interception and inspection of private correspondence that one would normally associate with an intrusive security state. In the first place, this structure grants *Three Guineas* a measure of subterfuge; layers of (fictional) letters, hypothetical letters within letters, and extensive textual apparatuses often make it difficult to decide when—or if—Woolf is being ironic. In the second place, Woolf is able to employ the epistolary form as a means of productively dissolving the border between public and private spheres. Addressing her first (male) correspondent, Woolf

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characterizes the letter as a view “of your world as it appears to us who see it from the threshold of the private house; through the shadow of the veil that St. Paul still lays upon our eyes; from the bridge which connects the private house with the world of public life” (22–23). St. Paul, whom Woolf describes in a note as “the virile or dominant type, so familiar at present in Germany” (198), comes to represent a whole tradition of subjugation. One of her most salient points is that those who are “veiled” and do not live by the sword may still die by the sword; wartime photographs of “ruined houses and dead bodies [of] men, women and children” remind us that “the public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (168). The dangerous intersection of these “worlds” serves as a justification for Woolf’s offensive, though nominally “passive,” posture; women must intervene as a matter of survival.

The problem, though, is that women’s entry into the academic and professional spheres will inevitably involve accepting “unreal loyalties.” “If you succeed in those professions,” Woolf warns, “the words ‘For God and the Empire’ will very likely be written, like the address on a dog-collar, round your neck” (85). This leaves few options: “Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. . . . It is a choice of evils” (90). The solution, she believes, rests in uncovering the lives of women, past and present, whose lived “experiments” provide models of engaged citizenship that resist ideological assimilation (91). To find them, one must move beyond the standard archives and repositories of knowledge by reading “between the lines” of patriarchal discourse (93). Here, Woolf points out, one finds individuals like the author, archeologist, and policy maker Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), “who, though the diplomatic service was and is shut to women, occupied a post in the East which almost entitled her to be called a pseudo-diplomat.” In reality, though Woolf does not mention it specifically, Bell’s pseudo-diplomacy extended into espionage during the war, making her—alongside Aphra Behn—one of the writer’s exemplary secret agents. Others, like the Victorian educational reformer Josephine Butler (1828–1906), are notable for their desire to avoid recognition and reward. All of the women whom Woolf offers as examples had, she explains, “the same teachers”: “Biography thus provides us with the fact that the daughters of educated

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men received an unpaid-for education at the hands of poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties" (95). In the end, Woolf asserts, "ridicule, obscurity and censure are preferable, for psychological reasons, to fame and praise" (97).

Based on her analysis of the "procession," as well as her investigation into the hidden history of professional women, Woolf concludes that modern women, while deserving greater access and initiation into these traditionally male-dominated spheres, should simultaneously seek an "outsider" position from which to resist and critique the "unreal loyalties" and "interested motives that are at present assured them by the State" (134). She therefore proposes the formation of an "anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders," a kind of league of extraordinary women, whose members would devote their energies to "liberty, equality, and peace" (126). At a time of international conflict, the Society would pursue its agenda vigorously—and contentiously—by refusing "to fight with arms," "to make munitions," or "to nurse the wounded." Crucially, it must also avoid the bureaucratic trappings of the "procession":

[What] chance is there, you may ask, that such a Society of Outsiders without office, meetings, leaders or any hierarchy, without so much as a form to be filled up, or a secretary to be paid, can be brought into existence, let alone work to any purpose? Indeed it would have been waste of time to write even so rough a definition of the Outsiders' Society were it merely a bubble of words, a covert form of sex or class glorification, serving, as so many such expressions do, to relieve the writer's emotion, lay the blame elsewhere, and then burst. (135–36)

Renouncing fame and reward, the Society would abandon the very structure of the traditional organization, its committees and hierarchies, even its physical space, in favor of a rhizomatic network of independent members. "Happily," Woolf writes, "there is a model in being," but one that must be apprehended "furtively," for it "dodges and disappears" (136). "[Evidence] of their existence," she continues, "is provided by history and biography in the raw—by the newspapers that is—sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them." Woolf quotes examples from newspaper clippings of women who are already living and working against the grain: the Mayoress of Woolwich's refusal to "darn a sock to help in a war" (137); the decision on the part of women's sports teams

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to withhold trophies and play the game “for the love of it” (137–38); and the growing “paucity of young women” (139) attending Church of England services. Marked by denial or abstention, such examples, the author implies, pull the rug from under the false loyalties and misplaced allegiances that license violence in the name of patriotism, competitive spirit, and religious devotion.

Although Woolf characterizes these measures as a “passive experiment” (139), *Three Guineas* also outlines a more dynamic program of resistance, one that requires her hypothetical recruits to work in a manner consistent with her colorful adjectives—that is to say, *furtively* and *covertly*. Women’s entry into the working world, provided they are able to avoid its ideological entrapments, would place them in a privileged position for gathering information on the uses and misuses of power. The outsiders should therefore “bind themselves to obtain full knowledge of professional practices, and to reveal any instance of tyranny or abuse in their professions” (132). Refusing to participate in any activity or organization “hostile to freedom, such as the making or the improvement of the weapons of war,” the Society’s members would likewise

refuse to take office or honour from any society which, while professing to respect liberty, restricts it, like the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. And they would consider it their duty to investigate the claims of all public societies to which, like the Church and the universities, they are forced to contribute as taxpayers as carefully and fearlessly as they would investigate the claims of private societies to which they contribute voluntarily. They would make it their business to scrutinize the endowments of the schools and universities and the objects upon which that money is spent. (133)

Like her earlier short story, “A Society,” in which a group of women infiltrate various strongholds of male power for the purposes of “asking questions” (1985, 119), *Three Guineas* sketches a similarly intrepid program. But now the veil of fiction has been rent and Woolf presents her Society as a real-world possibility, one in which the group’s findings are no longer confined to the private drawing room but potentially made public. If the *Dreadnought* Hoax of 1910 made waves at a time of growing international conflict, perhaps even nudging Britain—or at least a handful of irate politicians—toward the creation of a modern

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national security state, Woolf's 1938 polemic likewise foresees current debates over government transparency and the ethics of leaking classified information. As Judith Allen has suggested, Woolf proposes a means of resistance not dissimilar from what we would today call whistle-blowing (2015, 26), a disclosure targeting nothing less than the authoritarian kernel at the heart of democracy.

Such intrigues require a certain amount of caution. Just as the rhetorical (epistolary) structure of *Three Guineas* creates a level of ironic distance, the Society's real-world investigations should, similarly, be conducted *sub rosa*. "Secrecy is essential," Woolf insists. "We must still hide what we are doing and thinking even though what we are doing and thinking is for our common cause" ([1938] 2006, 141). The reasons she offers for the necessity of "concealment" are financial security—"Fear is a powerful reason; those who are economically dependent have strong reasons for fear" (142)—and an ambiguous but deep-seated resistance to gender equality embedded in culture and religion. However, this appeal to discretion notwithstanding, one suspects that there is another factor as well: secrecy is pleasurable. Like Orlando, a poet in disguise who employs a "cypher language" ([1928] 2006, 207), an adventurer who recognizes "the value of obscurity" and "the delight of having no name" (77), Woolf arguably positions her Society of Outsiders as a response to—or even parody of—the kinds of esoteric gentlemen's clubs she encountered throughout her life. This is not to downplay the seriousness of Woolf's project, or to suggest that her hidden motive is actually "secrecy for art's sake." Rather, the Society serves as a crucial counterweight to the restrictive veil of the Apostle Paul. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf repeatedly points out that the "procession" has traditionally employed secrecy to bar women: "[There] are many inner and secret chambers that we cannot enter. What real influence can we bring to bear upon law or business, religion or politics—we to whom many doors are still locked, or at best ajar, we who have neither capital nor force behind us?" (28). Shut out from "leagues, conferences, campaigns" (134), and other venues of power, Woolf offers her secret Society as an extension of the sororal alliance "against the world"—an underground, feminist version of Leonard Woolf's own Cambridge Apostles, or an answer to his beloved but ineffectual League of Nations.

The image of *Black Dossier's* Orlando gazing out upon a scene of Blitzkrieg and brimstone, meditating on the "pointless wars" and "millions

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slaughtered” in the course of human history, neatly crystalizes the writer’s own position at the dawn of the Second World War as she wages an imaginative assault on officialdom and the culture that legitimizes hero-worship and bloodshed. If in the popular imagination the spy is typically an agent of the state, Woolf’s Society exists beyond national boundaries. Cosmopolitan outsiders, they are thus able to view their own culture with a critical eye. The implicit argument in Woolf’s 1938 treatise is that fascism is as much at home in Britain as it is in Germany and Italy. Consequently, the mission of the Society is not to combat a threat from abroad—for the outsider, Woolf observes, “there are no ‘foreigners,’ since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner” ([1938] 2006, 128)—but rather a domestic one. Woolf’s conception of British fascism is much more explicitly stated in her wartime essay “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” in which she aims “to drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down” ([1940] 1942, 245). Drawing a correlation between “the Englishmen in their planes” and “the Englishwomen in their beds”—“We are equally prisoners tonight,” she declares—Woolf argues that the best way to combat fascism on both sides of the channel is not to take up arms but to convert thought into action, to “fight with the mind.” There is a relationship, Woolf indicates, between militarism and sexual oppression, and it falls to women to defuse “the desire for aggression”: “We must help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations. We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun” (247).

Within this wartime context, Woolf’s 1940 talk on the *Dreadnought* Hoax for the Rodmell Women’s Institute takes on a more critical and subversive character than the original act itself. In demystifying the military, Woolf continues the project of *Three Guineas* by trivializing the often absurd demands of honor; the “ceremonial taps” to the backside suffered by Woolf’s fellow “conspirators,” which she also lampoons in “A Society,” seem as ridiculous as the chests full of medals and dandyish uniforms she derides in her treatise. Moreover, as an admission of espionage, even in jest, Woolf’s talk plays on contemporary fears of leakage, particularly those involving women. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have observed, the Second World War brought about “a resurgence of patriarchal politics” (1994, 212); in addition to figuring women as symbols

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of maternity to be protected from the invader, wartime propaganda also characterized women as potential threats to national defense: "Posters enjoining silence as a protection against spies implied that women's talk would kill fighting men. The female spy, the femme-fatale or vamp whose charms endanger national security, was sinister in her silence, for her allure could penetrate the security needed to keep the fighting forces safe" (230). While it is admittedly a stretch to picture Virginia Woolf as a "vamp" or as attempting to identify with such an image, we should keep in mind that this was precisely the effect of the hoax in 1910; after the incident went public, Willy Fisher informed Adrian Stephen that the sailors were calling Virginia "a common woman of the town" (Fisher quoted in Stephen [1936] 1983, 52). Thirty years later, we find Woolf putting the constellation of female sexuality and national (in)security to use in her conception of the engaged conspirator for whom the leak is not a liability but a strategy, a means of exposing and defusing the "subconscious Hitlerism" that constitutes the true enemy of freedom and equality.

This perspective compels us to redefine the writer's relationship to her contemporaries, as well as her significance to our own security-conscious culture in the twenty-first century. In the first place, to think of Virginia Woolf in the way I have been suggesting—as identifying the artist-activist with the figure of the spy—is to conceive of a late-modernist Woolf who is more in company with the so-called Auden generation than she is with the pantheon of "high modernists." The tropology of train journeys, border crossings, disguises, and clandestine meetings so common in the early poetry of Auden and the novels of Christopher Isherwood finds an unlikely parallel in the mysterious passengers and secret societies that populate Woolf's writing. Like them, Woolf comes to the realization that fascism is not only a continental but a British disease, sees the necessity of converting art into action, and figuratively recruits the writer as a secret agent in an ongoing war against the establishment. In doing so, she shares with Auden, Proust, and other spy-minded writers what Erin Carlston has characterized as an "intelligent, productive disloyalty" (2013, 10). For "men writers," Carlston contends, "images of espionage and treason" offer "a way of registering a genuine and profound sense of alienation, skepticism, or even outrage [for those] who are nonetheless far too assimilated to their social worlds and too embedded in their national identities simply to reject them" (6). It would seem that for women writers too, and for Woolf in particular, spying provides a means of

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expressing opposition to authority from within the “procession” itself. But while Carlston emphasizes parallels between literary history and historical espionage—the Dreyfus affair, the Cambridge spies, the Rosenbergs, and so on—Woolf’s project reveals an important link between modernism and the new millennium. By investigating and publicizing abuses of power, her *Society of Outsiders* anticipates the hacktivist mentality of organizations such as WikiLeaks and Anonymous.³ Essentially, Woolf hypothesizes an alternative model of citizenship based on noncompliance, a form of engagement that recognizes strategic disclosure as the first step in the process of dismantling ideological loyalties. Like the cyber-radicals of our own time, Woolf recognizes the necessity of becoming what Julian Assange has termed a “spy for the people” (2013, n.p.).

Afterlives

From this vantage point, Woolf’s starring role in the spy yarn seems less a forced conscription than a natural consequence of her lifelong investment in tropes of espionage and secrecy. Both Hawkes and Manso’s *The Shadow of the Moth* and Barron’s *The White Garden* characterize the author as an intrepid investigator who simultaneously resists patriarchal authority within her own circle and uncovers acts of exploitation, warmongering, and betrayal within the greater establishment. In other words, both dramatize the writer’s conception of feminist agency through the device of the contemporary thriller—by subjunctively speculating as to the form such agency *could have* taken in Woolf’s own life.⁴ In effect, these novels stage what Woolf in her final work, *Between the Acts*, calls the “unacted part” ([1941] 2008, 104), the heroic self *in potentia* that exists outside of historical and biographical time.

However, while exploiting the relative freedom of invention afforded them by the subjunctive narrative, *Shadow* and *White Garden* also carry out their own projects of revenge that depart from the Woolfian spy-function by shifting the emphasis away from fascism toward leftist politics. Writing in the wake of Quentin Bell’s 1972 biography,⁵ Hawkes arguably attempts to reverse Bell’s portrayal of the writer as a sheltered and neurotic “virgin,” opting instead for an aggressive Woolf who exposes the ideological blindness of her (male) Bloomsbury associates, who are unable or unwilling to see the global conspiracy taking root in Westminster, a scheme to prolong the war and thereby bring about “a new

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order . . . superseding all national affiliations" (Hawkes and Manso [1983] 1984, 255). Throughout the novel, the young Virginia is in constant conflict with Leonard Woolf, who believes her actions to be motivated by madness, and Clive Bell, who likewise suspects that her interpretation of events is nothing more than an empty conspiracy theory, the product of an overactive imagination. Significantly, just as the narrative ultimately corroborates Woolf's spy-mania, thereby establishing the naïveté of her protectors, it also suggests that intellectual and artistic circles, in their effort to remain above and beyond the machinations of politicians and extremists, become implicated in acts of violence. No doubt Hawkes took a certain pleasure in depicting Quentin's father, Clive, as the unsuspecting dupe of a shadowy cabal bent on world domination, who skillfully exploit modernism's supposed autonomy—Bell's naive insistence that his work is a matter of "art, not politics" (238)—as a cover for political and economic gain. By representing Bloomsbury as a coterie so easily manipulated by malevolent forces, Hawkes and Manso's novel carries out an oblique indictment of the modernist notion of "art for art's sake," implying that art, politics, and conspiracy are inextricably intertwined.

White Garden is a fantasia on a similar theme, but while Hawkes and Manso's narrative focuses on a vaguely cosmopolitan menace—like the SPECTRE syndicate in a James Bond novel—Barron extends this critique to an undeniably communist threat, a plot involving the Cambridge Apostles, the esoteric society that numbered not only Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, and other Bloomsbury notables but also two of the most infamous double agents in the history of modern espionage, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt. In the novel, the two Soviet spies learn of Hitler's intention to break the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from a German agent who has been captured and "turned" by MI5's XX ("Double Cross") Committee. In an effort to warn the Soviet Union of Germany's imminent invasion, Burgess and Blunt enlist the help of Leonard, who contrives to smuggle the information out of Britain in his capacity as a publisher—more specifically, by slipping a secret message to Stalin in the page proofs of *Between the Acts*. Although Virginia is ultimately unable to expose the plotters publicly, leaving it to future Woolf scholars to discover her secret diary and bring about retroactive justice, she maintains a feminist resistance to patriarchal power that is, ironically, made to serve in the interests of national security.

In both novels, therefore, the real Woolf's potentially subversive politics are recuperated as a kind of patriotic policing, a mole-hunt for

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British traitors. Her fictional counterparts are more akin to what Oliver Buckton calls the “accidental spy,” characters who, in the manner of a John Buchan or William Le Queux invasion yarn, “become caught up in international conspiracies against British security and respond to the challenge” (2015, 33). Accordingly, both novels suggest that Woolf’s 1941 death by drowning was not, as is commonly believed, a suicide, but a murderous cover-up—a liquidation, we might say. While neither of these texts claims the status of a conspiracy theory, this counterfact is ideologically consistent with the fictional transposition of Woolf’s adversarial focus from nationalism to *internationalism*. If the writer’s real-life suicide may be interpreted as a final gesture of protest, of a profound distress in the face of warring nations, then murdering her also has the effect of robbing the act of its critical force. Early Cold War thinkers recognized the symbolic weight of Woolf’s suicide; in *The God that Failed*, a 1949 collection of essays written by famous ex-communists, Stephen Spender relates the anecdote of a Marxist poet and literary critic “who, when Virginia Woolf took her life in 1941, wrote in a manner of congratulating her on having chosen the path of historic necessity, and indicating that other bourgeois writers could be expected to follow her example” (1963, 267). Understood as a symptom of capitalistic decline, the writer’s suicide offered Soviet critics a high-profile example of the moral bankruptcy of the West. If so, its reversal becomes a positive affirmation of Western values, particularly in *White Garden*, which not only (virtually) contains Woolf’s dissenting politics but also redirects the Woolfian spy-function in opposition to communism. Appropriately, considering Barron’s history with the CIA,⁶ this fictional “turning” fits in with the Anglo-American intelligence community’s historical incursions into the world of arts and letters. As a complement to writers who worked as propagandists, or whose books were used as gambits in the Cold War *Kulturkampf*,⁷ the subjunctive fantasy permits the spectral recruitment of the “literary agent,” summoned from beyond to defend the realm. The author of *Three Guineas* may not have lived to take part in the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, which solicited the unwitting contribution of so many of her contemporaries, but it is noteworthy that the first issue of that organization’s literary journal, *Encounter*, edited by Spender, featured “Pages from a Diary” by Virginia Woolf.⁸

Regardless of whether *White Garden* and *Shadow* remain faithful to their subject’s vision, these speculative fictions succeed in opening a space for considering the real Woolf’s call to vigilance and its resonance for

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the twenty-first century. As they do so, they reveal the peculiar rapport between modernism and espionage that we find throughout the author's life and work. Perhaps it is appropriate that the fictional Leonard Woolf in *White Garden* should choose to encode his secret message between the lines of *Between the Acts*. In Woolf's final novel, set in 1939, high and popular culture are juxtaposed in a way that suggests even the most outlandish of fantasies may contain a modicum of truth. If books "are the mirrors of the soul," Woolf writes, then the Pointz Hall library evinces "a tarnished, a spotted soul":

For as the train took over three hours to reach this remote village in the very heart of England, no one ventured so long a journey without staving off possible mind-hunger, without buying a book on a bookstall. Thus the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored. Nobody could pretend, as they looked at the shuffle of shilling shockers that week-enders had dropped, that the looking-glass always reflected the anguish of a Queen or the heroism of King Harry. ([1941] 2008, 12)

Here, the presence of "shilling shockers"—the sort of "bad books" that Woolf in "Bad Writers" describes as "not the mirrors but the vast distorted shadows of life" that "[revenge] themselves upon reality" ([1918] 1987, 328)—signifies more than the "soul bored" and in need of pulp to satisfy "mind hunger"; the intrusion of the thriller into high culture embodies a desire, particularly at a time of crisis, for fictional worlds in which one may act out the "unacted part," the heroic persona that exists somewhere in the half-light of daydreams.

It may be that among the speculative "histories" and steampunk yarns that incorporate, alongside their Victorian forebears, a bizarre array of modernist authors and characters, there are those that justify Woolf's interest in the truth value of popular genres, especially in their potential to offer a critical angle on modernism itself—through a spy-glass. Just as intelligence officers and espionage historians frequently resort to modernist metaphors when attempting to describe the experience of intelligence work—the secret agent's Joycean mantra of "silence, exile, and cunning" (Joyce ([1916] 1977, 247), the field of operations as an Eliotic "wilderness of mirrors" ([1920] 1958, 33), and so on—the tropes of espionage perform a similar function for modern literature, making visible through fictional agencies and imagined complicities the plots (*les intrigues*) of modernist politics and aesthetics.

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Notes

1. Graham Greene used to subtitle his early thrillers “entertainments” to distinguish them from what he considered to be his more serious works of fiction.
2. UK Official Secrets Act, 1911, 1 and 2 George V, chapter 28, section 3.
3. Indeed, various websites associated with Anonymous have shared a quotation usually attributed to Woolf: “For most of history Anonymous was a woman.” This is, in fact, a misquotation of a line from *A Room of One’s Own*: “I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” ([1929] 2007, 53). The original is arguably less meme-friendly.
4. Wai Chee Dimock has characterized the subjunctive mood as “hovering just below the threshold of actualization, casting its shadow on the known world” (2009, 243). Like the popular fantasies that constitute, according to Woolf herself, “the vast distorted shadows of life” ([1918] 1987, 328), Dimock’s conception of the subjunctive is that of a “syntactic underground” offering “thinkable versions of the world” (243). *Shadow* and *White Garden* extend the syntactic subjunctive to the level of narrative; as “underground” stories, these novels investigate the relations between art and action, artist and agent, by treating Woolf as if she were involved in wartime espionage.

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5. Ellen Hawkes (Rogat) is a Woolf critic with a history of challenging the predominant image of the author as a pacifist introvert. In response to Quentin Bell's 1972 biography of Woolf, Hawkes published an essay in *Twentieth-Century Literature* titled "The Virgin in the Bell Biography," in which she criticizes Bell for offering a vision of his aunt as "a neurotic virgin cloistered from experience" (1974, 96), thereby eliding Woolf's "sense of herself as a woman . . . and her criticism of culturally and publicly defined masculine values [which] are at the heart of both her fiction and, as one would expect, her diaries" (98). In this light, *Shadow* may be read as a further corrective to the Bell biography.

6. According to her website, Stephanie Barron (Francine Matthews)—the author of (among other things) a series of Jane Austen mystery novels—spent four years as an intelligence analyst for the CIA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during which time she took part in a number of investigations, including the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland (see Barron n.d.).

7. For more on the CIA's investment in art and literature, see Saunders 1999. For a more recent discussion of the role that modernism in particular played in the Cold War, see Barnhisel 2015.

8. See Woolf 1953. The diary excerpt, which constitutes the first feature of the issue, includes entries dated from 1926 to 1933, mostly focusing on Woolf's relationships and conversations with other writers (Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, and George Bernard Shaw), as well as entries concerning her ideas about writing, the transmutation of thought into art, and so on. The selection is immediately followed by Leslie Fiedler's "Postscript to the Rosenberg Case," a vitriolic attack on the myth of the couple's innocence and their image as martyrs. This is a curious juxtaposition of texts, perhaps an attempt to correlate high-modernist aesthetics with anticommunist politics.

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Recovering Islands: Scotland, Ocean, and Archipelago in *To the Lighthouse*

Nels Pearson

“One can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land,”
said Prue.

—Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Among the significant effects, or by-products, of Anglophone postcolonial theory and cultural study is that it has compelled English society to reflect critically upon its own constructions of race, nation, and modernity. More recently, this self-reflection has been bolstered by interrogations of the cultural-geographic abstractions that make up the traditional “island nation” image of Great Britain and the related notion of the organic relationship between this national geography and imperial expansion via the sea. Reinforced by UK devolution, this new British historiography is exemplified in J. G. A. Pocock’s “present[ation of] ‘British history’ as archipelagic rather than English,” wherein the term “archipelagic” is used “to remind ourselves . . . that we are writing a history pelagic, maritime and oceanic, into which an extraordinary diversity of cultural and other movements has penetrated deeply” (2005, 78). In literary history, this approach is represented by John Kerrigan’s call “to strip away modern Anglocentric and Victorian imperial paradigms to recover the long, braided histories played out across the British-Irish archipelago” (2008, 2).

Such archipelagic models have resulted in our seeing Scottish, Welsh, Manx, and Cornish populations, and their associated peninsulas, coasts, and islands, less as peripheral sites of archaic, romanticized, or inherently

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distinct subcultures within a centripetal, Anglocentric Britishness and more as examples of an interactive history of diverse cultures played out across a shared island ecology and maritime economy. The move in Irish studies toward less binary, more culturally varied and transnational approaches to the relationship between England, Ireland, and the oceanic empire has only redoubled this new understanding.¹ As a result, and despite Brexit, we are learning to think about the “British Isles” as a North Atlantic archipelago across which notions of Britishness and Englishness have been in near constant flux, contingent upon constructions of the “Celtic fringe” that belie the complexity and diversity of interrelationships among Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales, and Cornwall, as well as the migrations woven into each (see Kerrigan 2008, 11–12).

These studies shed significant light on Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927)—and especially on the meanings of the Scottish Hebrides as a setting—in ways that have not been sufficiently recognized. With its setting in the Hebrides near the northwest extremity of Great Britain, evoking the Stephens’ summer home in Cornwall at the extreme southwest; its imagery of sea, coasts, and islands; and its pervasive motif of entities drifting apart and reassembling, *To the Lighthouse* profoundly evokes the archipelagic reality of the Anglo-Celtic Isles. And yet, only a handful of critics have considered the political or historical significance of the novel’s setting at any length. Those who have done so, most notably Jane Goldman, have pointed out that the Scottish allusions and contexts are in fact quite substantial, and that they are integral to the novel’s interrogation of patriarchal and imperial ideologies.² Meanwhile, expressly postcolonial readings of *To the Lighthouse* have either overlooked the Scottish setting or have interpreted it as part of a modernist subversion of dominant nationalistic or imperial paradigms.³ In what follows, I hope to offer a more comprehensive, archipelagic reading of the novel—one that explores how it both interrogates and participates in problematic cultural and geographic constructs of Britishness, especially as these were manifest in a United Kingdom that had recently seen most of the Irish island violently separated into a Free State.

To properly situate *To the Lighthouse* in an archipelagic context, it is helpful to review some of the basic history linking England, Scotland, and the British empire—history whose literary dimensions, and broader thematic significance, Woolf would have taken for granted. After Scotland lost its independence to England in 1707, prompting the “inventing” of

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the Kingdom and of the “would-be nation” of Great Britain (Colley 2005, 11), many of its regions underwent an industrial boom fueled by their involvement in the British maritime empire. Scotland is thus indissolubly linked with empire and the concept of Britishness, first as an internal, contiguous colony differentiated by class, language, and social formations rather than race and, soon thereafter, as a collaborator in imperial practices, migrations, and markets. Even as many Scottish institutions and rural populations were eroded under England’s imperial control and the concomitant surge of capitalism, so too did many Scots find it expedient to serve as agents of empire, participating heavily in British settler migrations; imperial trade related to American tobacco, Asian tea and opium, and Caribbean sugar and rum; and the slave economy. In *Scotland’s Empire 1600–1815* (2003), T. M. Devine has extensively chronicled this interdependence of Scottish labor, capital, and overseas imperialism. Especially when it is employed abstractly by an artist associated with the metropolitan core, Scotland also brings to mind the notorious vagueness and “pluralist semantics” of the term “British” as a cultural or ethnographic marker (Pocock 2005, 37)—specifically its denotation of a modern, economically expedient union between England and Scotland, commingled with nebulous connotations of ancient Anglian society and a presumably common racial vocation to “rule the waves.”

Hence, as Woolf was no doubt aware, outer Scotland evokes the origins and the fragility of “Britishness” as well as its inherent ties to imperial expansion and oceanic dominion. The Scottish islands, in particular, also encourage readers to reflect on the cultural and geographic perimeter, or extreme limit, of Great Britain. Like Wales and Cornwall but in more pronounced ways, Scotland and its diffuse Celtic-Norse islands are thus reminders that Britishness and Great Britain, for all their effective power, are thin constructs—concepts that begin with appropriations and amalgamations and are hence always subject to dissolution and fragmentation. A map of the Hebrides—such as the one Lily Briscoe examines as she contemplates whether art can unify diverse entities—reminds us that the islands themselves represent this fragile contingency, insofar as they physically embody the twin notions of assembly and dispersal.⁴

The timing of *To the Lighthouse*, composed between August 1925 and March 1927, is also significant from an archipelagic standpoint.⁵ For the mid-1920s were marked by a concern for the size, shape, and nature of

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Britain and the United Kingdom, especially in a postwar period that had seen the partition of Ireland after the violent Anglo-Irish War (1919–21) and Irish Civil War (1922–23). Throughout the early to mid-1920s, the isles witnessed a trend toward what could be called “little Britainism,” whereby it became easier to imagine the United Kingdom (now made up of Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) as culturally “British,” a concept that itself became more English. As Kerrigan notes in *Archipelagic English*, “The remapping of Irish culture [caused a] setback to imperial unionism [that] both reinforced ‘little Englandism’ and . . . made it easier to think of ‘Britain’ as England writ large” (2008, 4–5). The 1920s are also crucial, he adds, “because the publication of ‘The Newbolt Report’ [in 1921] is conventionally identified as the start of modern, institutionalized English [language and literature curricula]” (4). Kerrigan reads the Newbolt Report as a reactionary Anglicizing of archipelagic literatures—a counter to Gaelic and Celtic nationalist movements, one that had begun with the 1901 edition of Robert Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, which had “advanced [arguments] for regarding Scottish Highland and Irish culture as ‘English’ [that were] implausibly, racially unionist.”

More than just an intellectual matter, these curricular reactions to emergent Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and Manx language movements were instrumental in the construction of the isles as an Anglocentric British state. “Celtic” vernacular literatures had become a respectable subject of academic study around the turn of the century, thanks to French and German Celticists and, in the isles, to Matthew Arnold, who had promoted their study against the reigning, philistine disdain for anything that mitigated the pan-insular dominance of the English language. However, the merit and impact of those literatures were for him limited to the manner in which they expressed spiritual, premodern sensibilities that could help temper the more industrial and civic English mind. Writes Arnold,

It is not in the outward and visible world of material life that the Celtic genius of Wales or Ireland can at this day hope to count for much; it is in the inward world of thought and science. [Let us not] attend . . . to what it will be or will do, as a matter of modern politics. It cannot count appreciably now as a material power; but, perhaps, if it can get itself thoroughly known as an object of science, it may count for a good deal, far more than we Saxons, most of us, imagine, as a spiritual power. (1883, 12)

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This association of Celticism with a transcendent and hence antimaterialist culture, an idea borrowed by Abbey Theatre revivalists and to an extent by Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance, initiates a self-fulfilling binary. For one of its effects is that Celtic traditions, even as they are being included on the cultural map of the British Isles, are simultaneously being contained as the source of a “spirituality”—what Arnold calls “the Titanism of the Celt, his passionate, turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact” (1883, 118)—that precedes the pragmatic reason now essential to statecraft and material, capitalist progress. At best, “as an object of science,” the Celtic element can be utilized to make these Saxon priorities more humane. The romanticized or mythologized Celt is thus left outside the pale of progress—included within a vaguely Britannic space, yet removed from the map of the *actively* historical, trans-insular state.⁶

In its plot and characters, *To the Lighthouse* only briefly engages these concerns over Britishness, Scotland, and the Celtic fringe. But one of the ways it does so is through the family surname, Ramsay, which suggests that Mr. Ramsay or one of his progenitors is of Scottish birth or extraction. Such a connection was of course widely shared across English families (including, by her claim, Woolf’s own), and its likelihood in Mr. Ramsay’s case is further implied when Mrs. Ramsay contrasts her genteel Italian heritage to “the sluggish English, or the cold Scotch” bloodlines that she apparently aligns with her husband (*TL* 9).⁷ Mr. Ramsay is also invested in Enlightenment empiricism and Thomas Carlyle, icons of the Scottish contribution to the rationalist humanism that drove the imperial and political identity of Great Britain. As Jane Goldman has noted, Woolf thematically connects Mr. Ramsay, whose intellectual energy is restored as he reads Sir Walter Scott’s *The Antiquary*, to “John Ramsay (1736–1814) of Ochertyre, Stirling, who was the model for Scott’s antiquary” (1992, 142) and also to Robert Burns, insofar as Mr. Ramsay epitomizes the Victorian habit of romanticizing Scottish thinkers as emblems of a “genius,” rebellious passion, and patriarchal wisdom that modern, rationalized Englishmen fear they lack (see Goldman 2013a, 12–15; 2013b, 51–52). From an archipelagic perspective, this would also mean that Mr. Ramsay is participating in a long tradition, best exemplified in Boswell’s *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* with Samuel Johnson (beloved by Woolf), of casting the Celtic fringe as an emotive, atavistic antithesis to the rational pragmatism of “English” modernity.⁸

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Another example of how the novel overtly engages with the contingencies of Scottish/English relationships involves Charles Tansley, Mr. Ramsay's student, who, more than any other of the family guests, is an advocate of Labour and a critic of imperial capitalism. Not coincidentally, Tansley traces his subversive political attitude to a lower-middle-class family history, represented in an uncle, possibly Scottish, who "kept the light on some rock or other off the Scottish coast" (TL 92). While Mr. Ramsay and his guests are discussing more abstract matters, Tansley decries imperial policy in the Highlands, railing against the "wages and unemployment" and the government's "most scandalous acts" in the Hebrides, as well as the fact "that the fishing season was bad; that the men were emigrating" (93–94). When he boasts about his uncle the lighthouse-keeper, his listeners respond with what could be called a typically Anglo-British attitude toward this image of the evanescent, masculine-heroic Scottish laborer. As Woolf's narrator sarcastically implies, this well-rehearsed attitude is equal parts civil forbearance and patronizing romance: "They had to listen to him when he said that he had been with his uncle in a lighthouse in a storm" (92).

As a voice of Scottish agency, Tansley, who apparently does not have Scottish family ties beyond his uncle, and whose voice we hear only filtered through others' consciousnesses, is benign at best. Arguably, his most viable defense of the region is his dismissal of the romanticized image of Sir Walter Scott maintained by others, chiefly Ramsay. His self-identification with Scottishness does, however, help expose the dynamic of Britishness as a codependent crisis of identity and masculinity—leading equally to Mr. Ramsay's fear of lost passion and to Tansley's insecure misogyny, expressed in his infamous proclamation that "women can't paint, women can't write" (48). Associated with Guy Fawkes (as he thinks of "these mild cultivated people, who would be blown sky high . . . one of these days by the gunpowder that was in him" [92]), Tansley represents a subversion of Anglo-Protestantism but is treated in a condescending way, perceived by others as a Scottish stereotype of a "talkative" (93) agitator, bullheadedly indifferent to social and class protocols. And even as Woolf satirizes this dynamic, she also registers her own Anglocentric class position, writing that each person hearing Tansley worries that he or she ought to feel "outraged and indignant" at his facts but really "feel[s] nothing at all [about] the government [and] the fishermen" (94).

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Tansley thus stirs in the Ramsay family modern anxieties not simply about Englishness but about late Britishness—a milieu preoccupied with its imperial self-image, uncertain about its relationship to the Scottish periphery, and at its most vulnerable when its performative “civility” is exposed as such. The narrator’s early nod to the decidedly British nature of the family’s anxiety is thus strongly enhanced by the Highland setting: “For there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace, though to them all there was something in this of the essence of beauty” (7). It is worth noting that there are few better symbols of the Scottish roots of Great Britain than the Bank of England, whose creation in 1694 essentially underwrote the Union of 1707 and its subsequent imperial ventures. But more important here is that the desire both to fragment and to retrieve constructs of Britishness—to “sport with infidel ideas” that “mute[ly] question” their hegemony while also sensing in them “the essence of beauty” (6–7)—is integral to each family member’s flows of consciousness.

Indeed, it is in the novel’s more subjective, aesthetic registers that its alternatively subversive and conservative attitude to Anglocentric Britain is most compellingly revealed. A central example is Woolf’s impressionistic depiction of the Hebrides as a primal, synchronic zone that inherently resists the imperial concepts of historical progress and territorial dominion. Just as Woolf, in her diary, imagines her father’s “discovery” of Talland House in St. Ives, Cornwall (the model for the fictional home in Skye) as a home on “the toenail of England” by a “glistening bay which he must have found as it was at the beginning of time” (quoted in Lee 1999, 25), so too does *To the Lighthouse* attach “the awesome power of distance” to what it imagines as the primal aura of Skye’s geography.⁹ In part, Woolf probably chose Skye over the source location of St. Ives because in the 1920s, with St. Ives immersed in tourism and second homes, Skye, where she had not yet been, represented for her the sense she once had, in Cornwall, of a foreign and primitive place at the very fringe of British space. That Woolf saw these primitive motifs as subversive of the present social order is suggested by the fact that the Ramsay daughters—who harbor “infidel ideas” against English feminine domesticity—are the most receptive to the antimodern, disorienting forces of the island. Cam runs after “a vision . . . of a fairy kingdom on the far side of the hedge” (TL 54), Minta surveys the landscape “as if it were Constantinople seen

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through a mist" (73–74), and Nancy senses its "power sweeping savagely in . . . reduc[ing] her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, forever, to nothingness" (75–76).

The vision that allows Lily to complete her painting is similarly cast as a receptivity to the primal, synchronic energies of the land's end:

Suddenly, as suddenly as a star slides in the sky, a reddish light seemed to burn in her mind. . . . It rose like a fire sent up in a token of some celebration by savages on a distant beach. She heard the roar and the crackle. . . . she loathed it. But for a sight, for a glory it surpassed everything in her experience, and burnt year after year like a signal fire on a desert island at the edge of the sea. (175)

The suggestion here is that the "savage" island contains some universal desire—perhaps the impulse to send "signals" and hence for culture to emerge from nature—that the artist channels as she seeks to give form to intersubjective experiences, essences "immune from change . . . in the face of the flowing" (105). Such challenges to modern empiricism and historiographic linearity are consistent with what John Brannigan describes as the novel's subversion of the "geopolitical and patriarchal knowledge" disseminated in imperial, scientific discourses that "sought to gain mastery over nature" (2015, 111, 116), such as cartography, navigation, and meteorology. At another level, though, such equations of Skye with the synchronic, subjective, and primal also reflect reductive ideas of the Celtic fringe consistent with an Anglocentric cultural cartography. That is to say, even as it challenges imperial orders of history and place, Woolf's subjective impressionism also presupposes that the timeless essences and atavistic or universal forces that expose and threaten modernity are themselves inherent in and expressed by the Hebrides. These aesthetic maneuvers in turn obscure the material effect of Skye's own encounter with modernity, such as the land enclosures, mass emigrations, and "erosion and collapse of its native institutions" that marked its connection with the metropole (Hobsbawm 1978, 308–9). The vaguely Celtic-Brittonic aura of such primitive-universal motifs, especially where, as in Lily's vision of savages, they aim to counteract atomized modernity, reinstitutes a traditional, solipsistic practice whereby the metropolitan core seeks its obverse, as well as its presumed origin, in rural archipelagic zones that it consistently recasts as peripheral. Thus, even as *To the Lighthouse*

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disrupts imperial cartographies and delights in the notion of subjectivities drifting away and apart from hegemonic master discourses, so too do its themes of synchronic unity and retrieval reappropriate Anglocentric cartographies and points of view.

This vacillation between wanting, on the one hand, to dissolve the construct of Britain and, on the other, to recover that construction, is especially evident in the novel's depictions of the relationship between land and water. Although Woolf did not visit the Hebrides until 1938, nor the West of Ireland until 1934, she knew from Cornish and English coasts that throughout the archipelago bodies of water and landmasses often appear to mingle along the horizon, challenging one's sense of their distinctness and thus of the terrestrial limit (the Greek word "archipelago" can be translated as a "great sea," or connective islands and water that assume the appearance thereof). In many instances, *To the Lighthouse* channels this terraquatic effect into habits of mind, equating water with modes of consciousness that disrupt territorial and nation-statist orientation. Lily Briscoe and William Bankes are drawn to the bay, for example, because "it was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land, and gave to their bodies even some sort of physical relief" (TL 20).

As is often the case in Woolf's work, however, floating too far adrift from the connective fabric of the social body is also figured as risking engulfment in the utterly subjective, or the universalizing fluidity of time and space. Lily Briscoe, for example, anxiously watches Mrs. Ramsay "drift into that strange no-man's land where to follow people is impossible," and tries to track her "as one follows a fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon" (84). When the habitual conversations around her stop, Mrs. Ramsay similarly moves from feeling in harmony with the cyclical crashing of surf to fearing the primal and universal arbitrariness of the sea: "Like a ghostly roll of drums [the waves] remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea" (15-16). Likewise, when the Ramsay home is left empty for years, its slow erosion is figured as an immersion: "sea-moistened" (126) airs loosen its hinges, light through its panes gives the effect of "sun-lanced waters" (136), and it is nearly engulfed in "a pool of Time that was fast closing over them" (138-39). In the same vein, Lily Briscoe, during a moment of socially detached, seaside contemplation, worries about being subsumed in "the waters of annihilation" (181).

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Among their other functions, these figurative associations between social dispersal and the fluid, universalizing effects of aquatic submersion serve to critique the integral land-water cartographies of imperial Britishness. After all, for those culturally identifying with Great Britain, postwar modernity involved a threat to the centuries-old practice of imagining the sea as an extension of the nation and state, and of harnessing its universal nature to the cultural imaginary of Britishness. As recently as 1902, in his opus *Britain and the British Seas*, the English geographer Halford Mackinder had confidently claimed that "Britain is possessed of two geographical qualities, complementary rather than antagonistic: insularity and universality" (1902, 11). These were complementary, for Mackinder, because of England's control of "the ocean-highway, which is in its nature universal [as] every part of the ocean is accessible from every other part." As John Heggland has recently noted, Mackinder thus "imaginatively annex[es] the spaces of the ocean to the British empire" (2012, 112). As it vacillates between embracing the coast as a space of deterritorialization and its attraction to the unbounded sea as a space of universality, both alluring and lethal, *To the Lighthouse* offers a profoundly ambivalent meditation on the loss of this oceanic possession.

This ambivalence is especially evident in "Time Passes," where universal time and space are figured as water. The "downpouring of immense darkness" and "the flood, the profusion of darkness" (TL 125–26) that envelop the Ramsay home, for example, are images of abstract time's erosion of particular memories and places. An especially important figuration of the synchronic as the aquatic emerges when Woolf compares the unruly waves to "leviathans" devoid of reason. Invoking the Hobbesian equation of leviathan and state, she here implies that the state, if not civil governance in general, has been lost to a primal, arbitrary force: "The winds and waves desported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, . . . And lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself" (134–35). As "leviathan" devolves from state to beast, civil structure to "wanton" savage, so too are the cultural orders of particular time and space dissolved into a fluid "universe." Threatened by time, the Ramsay home itself is figured as a capsizing ship: "sinking, falling, [it] would have turned and pitched

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downwards to the depths of darkness" (138). Historical and linear units of time—"night and day, month and year"—are subsumed "shapelessly" into an unmapped, synchronic statelessness in which, as Prue says, "one can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land" (125). In the darkest moments of "Time Passes," then, we witness a complete reversal of British-imperial, terraquatic dominion. But we also witness an apprehensive, orientalist gesture of annihilation that reveals deep hesitations about losing one's landed orientation and relies, for its full aesthetic impact, upon an epistemological trajectory that had previously taken oceanic dominion for granted. The global purview of imperial Britain is, in other words, still inversely invoked by the capacious, liquid "oblivion" (139) that would exist in its stead, as if there were no middle ground between an established historical-geographic dominion and an utterly fluid universe.

Similar anxieties over the prospect of postimperial, devolved, decentered Britain are woven into the novel's intertextual conversation with earlier British literature, which often revolves around the theme of drowning. Woolf repeatedly alludes to William Cowper's "The Castaway" (1799), for example, in which fears of isolation and transience are figured by a sailor thrown from a ship and left to drown in "the Atlantic billows" (Cowper 1934, 432). Cowper starts by hailing the ship and its captain as embodiments of "Albion" ("No braver chief could Albion boast / . . . / Nor ever ship left Albion's coast") but concludes with the traumatic images of permanent isolation ("We perished, each alone") that echo in Woolf's novel (431–32). This underscores Woolf's concern that subjective dissociation from the connective tissues of society, taken to extremes, risks engulfment in seas of universal, indifferent space and time, but it also suggests that she related this concern to an anxiety about the increasingly contingent status of Great Britain itself. It too is a drifting ship of state—in Cowper's words, a "floating home forever left" (431)—that dissenting subjects wish to abandon even as they fear being cast adrift.

Woolf evokes Cowper's concluding phrase near the end of the novel as Cam, sailing to the lighthouse with her father and brother, looks back at Skye, receding on the sea's horizon. First noticing the island's perimeter, she then begins to see it as a geographic whole, its shape like a leaf "with a dent in the middle and two sharp crags" (*TL* 188). And as the island further recedes, it seems ever smaller, making "the sea more important now than the shore" (190). In tracing the changing way Cam

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sees Skye, then, *To the Lighthouse* figures its own changing imagination of the British island, inviting us to think first of its entire shape and perimeter, from St. Ives to Skye, and then, from a globalized perspective, of how shrunken and vulnerable it seems: "The island had grown so small that it . . . looked like the top of a rock which some wave bigger than the rest would cover" (204).¹⁰ As she drifts away from the island, Cam tells herself an "adventure" (188) story about "escaping from a sinking ship" (190), concluding it while "dabbling her fingers in the water," by thinking that here "a ship had sunk" and murmuring "how we perished, each alone" (191). Crucially here, the impulse toward an adventuresome "escape" from the familiar island also highlights the need to feel "safe" from drowning. And in the cautiousness of "dabbling her fingers" in the water, Cam repeats the similar fear Mrs. Ramsay had once felt, when she had to reassure herself, regarding the family's journey to the lighthouse, that "they could not all be drowned" (79). In such moments, Woolf seems attuned to how the territory of belonging, however much one might wish to abandon it entirely, is the normative condition of being that gives meaning to cognitive subversions and peripheral, subjective adventures. If we trust the meaning of terra firma, our departures from it can be enlivening and adventurous—if not, the land itself begins to dissolve and turn to water, submerging its inhabitants in a fluid and pervasive rootlessness.

Both the allure and fear of submersion are also evident in Woolf's allusions to William Browne's "Siren's Song" (in particular, the line "*Steer, hither steer your winged pines, all beaten mariners*" [TL 119]) from the poet's 1613 *Britannia's Pastorals*. Drawing on Homer to meditate on the enticing perils of adventure, Browne's poem, like Cowper's, deviates from its author's more celebrated work of landscape poetry. *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, an icon, as Kerrigan points out, of British cultural hegemony, praises Browne for his "vivid and true" descriptions of "the characteristic English landscape" (Chambers 1880, 238–39) and lauds Cowper for showing readers "English scenery and domestic life faithfully and tenderly delineated" (1902, 602). That both poets were known primarily as charters of Anglocentric British space underscores the degree to which the poems alluded to in *To the Lighthouse* reflect the isolated nation's anxieties about drowning—anxieties, that is, about British space being both defined and threatened by water, maritime Britain's acute fear that governable land, associated with established history and geography, might be lost to ungoverned water, associated with the "strange no man's land" (TL 84) of unstructured time and space.

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Janet Winston has rightly observed that *To the Lighthouse* “stag[es] the decline of the British Empire through its obsessive attention to sinking ships and islands” (1996, 48). But in Woolf’s aesthetic, submersion also involves historical and cultural synchronicity—a subjective perspective that “confounds” and “confuses” (TL 126,128) objects—constituting a far more ambivalent response to the potential dissolving or surrender of Britain’s land and empire. In *The Waves*, which also evokes St. Ives and meditates on the coastal limits of Great Britain, Bernard repeatedly figures submersion as a dissolution of particularity, such as when, in the aftermath of Percival’s death in India, he thinks, “How strange it seems to set against the whirling abysses of infinite space a little figure with a golden teapot on his head. . . . Our English past—one inch of light. . . . How can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence?” (Woolf 1978, 227). Similarly, in the dinner party scene just prior to “Time Passes,” the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* opposes the uniting customs of the family to the leveling flux of the external, fluid world. Gathering around their hostess, the family and guests view Skye through “panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily” (TL 97). Once the group becomes “conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island,” it also recognizes its “common cause against that fluidity out there.” Importantly, in troping Skye as “fluid,” again Woolf draws on a subjective and dematerialized, touristic view of the Hebrides, associating the island landscape not with modern historical events but with abstract or cyclical time. When Woolf finally visits Skye in 1938, her description of the island in a postcard to Duncan Grant reflects this same inclination to view the land as subjective, primitive, and fluid: “Skye is often raining, but also fine: hardly embodied; semi-transparent; . . . Remote as Samoa; deserted; prehistoric” (1980, 248).¹¹

From an archipelagic perspective, associating the Hebrides with immaterial states of being, with oceanic liquidity, is all the more compelling because the Ramsay home on Skye is ultimately *not* absorbed by these forces. Rather, it is “rescued” from what the narrator describes as a fluid “universe” or “oblivion” by means of a poetical act of memory, retrieval, and reassembly (TL 135, 139). Indeed, the Scottish cleaning women’s laborious restoration of the home, figured as the rescue of a capsizing ship, is a key manifestation of the novel’s concern with transcending individual subjectivity and thus with saving individuals from

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“perish[ing] each alone” (135). In this way, the novel’s aesthetic attempt to reclaim the fragments and peripheries of individual experience parallels its attempt to reclaim a Scottish territory. In “Time Passes,” that is, a link between England and Scotland—or Britain in microcosm—is essentially salvaged from a condition of utter, oceanic fluidity.

In this light, we might reconsider and further refine Jed Esty’s influential argument about Woolf and the political cartographies of British modernism in *The Shrinking Island*. Esty holds that the “apocalyptic temporalities” (2004, 50) and expansive spatial abstractions of British modernism reflect the concerns of the early twentieth century, with its emphasis on the aftermath of war, while the period of the 1930s to the 1960s is marked by an inward, “anthropological turn” (3) that “channel[s] the potential energy of a contracting British civilization into a resurgent discourse” (54) of native Englishness. T. S. Eliot’s *The Four Quartets* (1943) and Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941) exemplify this shift, he argues, by turning to “the vitality of native rituals” (55) and “natively English form[s] of primitive resistance to modernity” (64). *To the Lighthouse*, by contrast, with its concern for the “irreversible and disturbing aftereffects of a modern world war,” is characterized, as Esty sees it, by the “apocalyptic” (91) aesthetics of earlier English modernism. However, if we look more closely at the cultural-geographic implications of the motifs of retrieval and reassembly in *To the Lighthouse*, we see more of what, in Esty’s account, we might expect from a 1927 novel: a work poised at the very tipping point between postwar, imperial cataclysm and national retrenchment. Or, I would add, between imperial cataclysm and archipelagic reappraisal.

After all, Woolf’s decision to take the biographical source material for *To the Lighthouse*—her childhood summers at Talland House in St. Ives, Cornwall, nearly the most southwestern point of Great Britain’s Celtic fringe—and project it onto the Isle of Skye, one of the most northwesterly points of that fringe, can itself be read as a form of archipelagic recovery or reappropriation. Just as the two halves of the novel divide and connect the pre- and postwar experiences of the Ramsay family, so too does Woolf’s choice of setting, and her manner of internalizing it, conflate these two peripheries of the United Kingdom after Irish independence. Indeed, this Cornish-Scottish superimposition becomes all the more significant when we note that Ireland is not only absent from the novel but also impossible as an alternative setting. For despite the smaller island’s many coastal settings that might have signified an ahistorical remoteness

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and might have inspired similar internalized reflection, Woolf would not have been as able to contain or control the meaning of Irish spaces, vis-à-vis Britishness, in the same way that she could with the Hebrides.

For one, this is because traditional, Anglocentric views of Scotland, which cast Scottish difference in terms of romance, atavism, or mythology, still held sway—were in fact essential to the dynamic concept of “Great Britain”—whereas such views of Irish culture and society had been too recently and violently challenged. Scotland’s cultural nationalism had strengthened the Union, deferring to Britishness and supplying a romantic and mythic element that productively balanced the Scottish Enlightenment’s capitalist and industrial leanings (see Harvie 2008, 111–14);¹² Ireland’s stronger and now more self-authored convergence of Celticism, Gaelic revival, and anti-imperial nationalism meant that such “ancient” mythologies, enlisted into violent nationalism in the present, could not be so easily confined to a symbolic level. The burdensome “Irish Question,” John Nash has convincingly shown, was also so commonplace among Woolf’s circle that she could not help but share its governing assumption that the Irish “might be charming and even poetic, but [were] also incapable of self-control and political responsibility” (2013, 267). This decidedly colonial view of the Irish, Nash demonstrates, appears throughout Woolf’s essays and letters, where the Irish are persistently cast as inherently “wordy, overbearing, and ill-disciplined” (267–68).

Woolf did not visit Ireland until 1934, but her diary record of her time there—with Fianna Fáil republicanism on the rise and the Ascendancy “hating the Irish Free State” (1984, 212) and clinging to what remained of its property under an evanescent *Cumann na nGaedheal* majority—reflects precisely these concerns. Although she loved Ireland’s “great stretches of virgin seashore,” notably remarking that they recalled “the original land that Cornwall & much of England was in Elizabethan times,” its landscapes struck her as too inscribed with historical material—“poverty, [emigration,] and a sense that life is receding” (209)—to be thought of in such a remote, abstract manner. Concluding her trip in Dublin, Woolf writes of feeling “in the midst of history . . . in an unsettled, feverish place” (215), and concludes that “it wouldn’t do, living in Ireland, in spite of the rocks and the desolate bays” (216). Unlike Skye, then, an Irish coast or periphery could not serve for her as a historically dematerialized signifier of “the original land” of the virgin British Isles, as an inspiring primal otherness.

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That Woolf's aesthetic deployments of Scotland reflect a desire to retain or reassemble Anglocentric Britishness is also apparent in her allusions to the Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott. At one level, those novels help Woolf satirically represent how the Victorian intelligentsia is implicated in patriarchal nostalgia and romantic constructs of Scottishness. For example, during the men's discussion of Voltaire and French history—which follows an apparently familiar path of both celebrating Enlightenment rationalism and lamenting the difficulty of thinking beyond its eventually utilitarian manifestations—William Banks proudly declares that he reads two of the Waverley novels per year. The way Mrs. Ramsay only half-listens to the men here frames the discussion as a tired, phallic rite, one that can only circle back on itself: "She let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment. . . . Then she woke up. It was still being fabricated. William Banks was praising the Waverley novels" (TL 106). When Tansley interjects that no one reads Scott anymore, Mrs. Ramsay fears it will undo the tiresome but class-sustaining habit of discussion, especially because it will stir Mr. Ramsay's worry. Indeed, threatened by the ephemerality of scholarly reputation, Mr. Ramsay does take to reading the Waverley novels. Selfishly, however, he derives from them an "astonishing delight and feeling of vigour" (120), renewing his own feelings of worth and his devotion to Carlyle, Hume, and the rational empiricists.

We can read this subplot of a Scott-inspired, Jacobite-romantic renewal of male, rationalist intellect as a subtle satire of a larger scale drama: English hegemony must repeatedly construct the image of an intemperate Scottish fringe whose passions can be lionized, but only in retrospect, as essential to the development of a civil and empirical British state. As it happens, in 1814, this was largely the purpose Scott himself saw *Waverley* as serving, with its essentially benign and nostalgic evocations of the Jacobite cause and Highland culture. Comparing his work to Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), which Edgeworth had hoped would justify the putatively impulsive Irish to English audiences and thus strengthen the new Union (Edgeworth 1992, 63), Scott suggests in his 1829 preface that the Waverley series might similarly "introduce [Scottish] natives to [our] sister kingdom in a more favorable light than they had been placed hitherto, and . . . procure sympathy for their virtues and

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indulgence for their foibles" (1985, 523).¹³ One of the strongest strains of modern belatedness in *To the Lighthouse* is the fact that the Ramsay group still engage in this threadbare, self-serving practice of inscribing Scottish difference in the past tense, coding it as spiritually elemental but impractical and hence historically concluded. Woolf thus exposes and critiques this Anglocentric practice, as at the novel's conclusion when "the little tinge of Scottish accent" returns to Mr. Ramsay's voice, "making him seem like a peasant himself" while Macalister takes him to the lighthouse with James and Cam (TL 164).

Satirizing such time-worn appropriations of Scottish identity, *To The Lighthouse* nonetheless also perpetuates them. Even if Woolf's intent is to expose the vulnerable Anglocentrism of the Ramsay group, for instance, readers are not permitted outside the luminous halo of their subjective view of the archipelago. The debate over the value of Sir Walter Scott thus remains circumscribed in a way relatively typical of modernist allusions: the literary past that is up for debate—that is to be either sundered or retrieved, censured or celebrated—is itself a limited cultural field that reflects a dominant and canonical ideology. Together with allusions to Cowper, Browne, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Carlyle, and others, the textual presence of the Waverley novels testifies to the Anglocentric arena within which questions of modernity's meaning (what has it torn asunder? in its aftermath, what can be salvaged?) are being posed. This limited view of Scottish texts in the British canon parallels Woolf's own range of vision as a critic, which substantively included older, classical authors like Scott and Burns but censured more subversive voices like Robert Louis Stevenson and barely recognized the then contemporary Scottish renaissance. In *To the Lighthouse*, such hegemonic readings of Scottish literature are countered by Tansley's argument that Scott is irrelevant to the current political moment, but he is not intended to be taken seriously. Indeed, as with Woolf's own critical essays on Scott, the novel's overall attitude toward the Waverley series is thus doubly conservative: in it, the series both signifies an archaic, patriarchal romanticism and embodies presumably "universal" premodern and antimodern sentiments that must be salvaged. A subtle, if unintended result is the recovery or reigning in of a potentially divergent Scottish culture.

Such an operation is dramatized when the Waverley novels are "fetch[ed] up from oblivion [with] a tea set one morning" (139) by the pair of Scottish cleaning women. If the retrieval of these two decidedly British icons functions partly as satire, it also conveys, in equal measure,

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a genuine anxiety at the prospect of losing an Anglocentric cultural hegemony over the Isles. After all, the novels are rescued from the fluid darkness of time by women who are in many ways canonical caricatures of the Scottish working class: “the toothless, bonneted” (130) Mrs. McNab and her companion Mrs. Bast, “red-haired [and] quick-tempered like all her sort” (139). To be sure, as she restores the property, Mrs. McNab is increasingly humanized and treated with compassion. However, representing “witlessness, humour, [and] persistency itself” (130)—a classed embodiment of “incorrigible hope” (131) and “a force working [to restore]; something not highly conscious” (139)—she also reflects a lot of what Woolf patronizingly lauded in Scott’s characters: a tidal force of humanity that, like nature itself, cyclically creates or destroys while remaining indifferent to modern social structures. Thus Mrs. McNab embodies the broader, dual, Anglocentric framing of Scotland we have seen repeatedly: a conduit of primal forces, resisting modernity, she is nonetheless also controlled, put to the service of sustaining or reviving the dominant English point of view.

Herself an admirer and voracious reader of Sir Walter Scott, Woolf shares many of William Bankes’s and Mr. Ramsay’s romantic and canonical sentiments about the power of the novelist’s capacious and verbally unconstrained rendering of humanity. Indeed, Mr. Ramsay’s revitalized reaction to the scenes of “poor Steenie’s drowning, and Muclebackit’s sorrow” (120) is essentially Woolf’s own. In her 1924 essay on Scott’s *The Antiquary*, the third novel in the Waverley series, Woolf in fact attributes her emotions when reading Scott to a restorative, near-lethal submersion. Setting out to defend a then-popular “Waverley novel reading habit,” Woolf admits a certain lack of sophistication in Scott but goes on to celebrate that his works forsake “the languor of the fine gentlemen who bored him” while advancing “the immense vivacity of the common people whom he loved” (1986, 455). For Woolf, the natural, organic force of his characters, “ladies and gentlemen . . . scarcely to be distinguished from ‘the winged denizens of the crag’” (456) who surround them, amounts to a tidal wave of “perennial vitality,” carrying the reader away and drowning all pretense of “proper,” class-sanctioned morality and aesthetic taste.

Woolf repeatedly compares Scott’s narrative scope and “talkative” characters to an ungovernable sea, figuring what she sees as the primal force of lower class “talk” (evident, for example, in Mrs. McNab’s ability to “drink and gossip as before” [TL 131]) as a universalizing flood that dissolves all order. Ultimately, this figuring of Scott’s Highlanders as an

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oceanic tide that is also nonetheless restorative functions to contain the threat they represent. Woolf thus offers praise for “the deep, the inscrutable, the universal ocean” that is Scott’s “complete presentation of life” and hails how “the parts [of his fictional world] grew together” in a storm-tossed manner, “without his willing it, and broke into ruin again without his caring” (1986, 457). For her, his depiction of a violent northern sea as it “clouds like disasters around a sinking empire” exemplifies this effect, and she lauds how such ornate descriptions are suited to the cultural indifference of a Highland storm that “roars and splashes and almost devours the group huddled on the crag” (454). Elaborating this feeling of being “almost devour[ed]” by Scott’s oceanic prose, she seems already to be thinking of the near-lethal engulfment of the Ramsay home in *To the Lighthouse*. Scott’s writing is “strange,” she suggests, reminding one that “the sovereigns who should preside have abdicated, [and] we are afloat on a broad and breezy sea without a pilot” (457). Woolf sees in Scott’s narratives, that is, one of the core images of her own gestating novel: the forces of nature subsuming, or *almost* subsuming, particular human endeavor and territory into a lethal and watery cosmos, leaving in their wake a vision of an ungovernable universal, a unity of all things.

For *To the Lighthouse*, then, Woolf thus needs the Scottish Highlands to function much like she feels that they do in the Waverley novels: as *both* an evocation of the universal, liquid force of primal indifference *and* a physical, familiar place so essential to the construction of one’s own society that it must be continually retrieved. In *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), Hugh MacDiarmid would later criticize precisely this practice whereby the romantic image of the Highlands is transformed by modernism into an image of antimodern, universalizing primitivism. Challenging how such dematerialized images of the Hebrides are deployed to serve “civilization’s urgent need today to refresh and replenish itself at its original sources,” MacDiarmid writes that “it is precisely the chief characteristic of the [island region] that if its history could be fully recovered, the very basis of our conceptions of British history would have to be torpedoed and very different conceptions take their place” (1939, ix). A sinking and shrinking imperial archipelago, that is to say, only appears as such, and only appears as a crisis, from within an Anglocentric construction of archipelagic time and space.

“People soon drift apart,” Mr. Bankes thinks to himself. Indeed, there is something uncannily archipelagic in *To the Lighthouse*’s pervasive concern with drifting, separating bodies. Even as it explores the distance

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of individual consciousnesses from one another, alongside the increased sense of “disintegration” (TL 112) in the wake of personal and national tragedies, so too does the novel long to unify—to “summon together” (62), or to draw “everything into stability” (113). Throughout it runs the desire, as Lily muses, to form “one stream” (113–14) out of “she . . . And this, and this . . . the sofa on the landing (her mother’s); . . . the rocking chair (her father’s); . . . the map of the Hebrides” in the hope that they might be “revived again” (113) or “illuminated [from] the darkness of the past” (172). As such, *To the Lighthouse* registers a crucial moment in the idea of Britain. On the one hand, it deploys the Hebrides as a fringe space whose diffuse, fractal coasts subversively expose the vulnerability of “Great Britain” as a contingent cultural-geographic abstraction. On the other, instead of representing Scotland as a historical *alternative* to that abstraction, it figures the islands as a universalizing, all-subsuming synchronicity into which subjects might be perennially cast adrift but for their desire to reconnect. In this, the novel actively retrieves English-metropolitan constructs of the Scottish periphery as historically discontinuous and immaterial—a place of romance, atavism, and the folk-universal. The result is a critical, yet decidedly Anglocentric, image of 1920s Britain in the wake of Irish independence: a shifting, contingent space shoring its imperiled substance against an arbitrary, watery universe.

§

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Notes

1. See, for example, Allen 2009 and Brannigan 2015, as well as the ongoing work of the Atlantic Archipelagos Research Consortium.
2. Goldman has demonstrated, for example, the correlation between Woolf’s use of a Scottish setting and her critique of patriarchy: “The ruling English

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patriarchy mythologized and allegorized Scotland into subservience” just as it did to women via the institution of marriage, and thus “Woolf’s Hebridean setting is perfect for a novel seeking to explore and dismantle the values of the old order” (1992, 146). She has also convincingly demonstrated that Woolf was for much of her life “a keen mental traveler to Scotland” (2013b, 8) and that her many allusions to Scottish literary and political romance are key to the novel’s own rebellious sensibilities.

3. In “Tae the Lighthouse: Woolf’s Scotland and the Problem of the Local,” Richard Zumkhawala-Cook proposes that “Scotland functions as an effort to disrupt the stability of nation altogether,” helping the novel to resist “national identifications so as to highlight alternative solidarities, namely the material conditions of gender and class represented throughout the text” (2008, 57–58). Additionally, several pioneering studies of Woolf and empire pay only passing attention to the Scottish setting. Janet Winston notably reads the novel as an “imperial allegory” wherein “tropes of imperialism” are ironically juxtaposed to reveal the “conflicting ideologies” of the colonial enterprise (1996, 62). In *Woolf Against Empire* (1994), Kathy Phillips also offers a thorough analysis of Woolf’s critique of the interrelationships of gender and imperialism in the novel. Neither consider that Scotland itself functions as a colonial setting.

4. As Hugh MacDiarmid puts it in *The Islands of Scotland*, the Hebrides “resemble very much a many roomed house [in which] entirely different activities are going forward,” and of which “a general assembly . . . is unthinkable” (1939, 7) due to their distinct local contours and varied maritime connections to other locations.

5. According to Hermione Lee’s biography of Woolf (1999, 471–72).

6. As Seamus Deane puts it, Arnold’s Celt is “merely a term in an argument which has as its goal the ratification of the great project for a . . . perfectly irresistible English civilization”—an appeal to “save morality by making his audience nostalgic for it rather than eager practitioners of it,” where “nostalgia is properly given to something already lost” (1987, 13–14).

7. Woolf writes to her cousin Emma Vaughan in 1907: “My Scotch blood had mixed long ago with the French and English, so that the finest connoisseur tasting it can detect only a peculiar sweetness . . . like the essence or soul of something long since dead” (quoted in Goldman 2013b, 8).

8. As Simon During notes of Boswell and Johnson’s 1775 *Journey to the Western Islands*, both the act and the style of English writing about the Hebrides has typically taken the place of an otherwise fluid boundary between the two societies. While the Scottish north is transformed, as it is written about, into

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a collective signifier of an indigenous premodern society, the status of the writer/observer as existing in a mobile frame of reference known by contrast as “modern” and rational is affirmed and strengthened by the same process (1990, 24–25).

9. The Stephens family purchase of Talland House is a prime example of the spread of modernization into the Celtic fringe. As Woolf notes in “A Sketch of the Past,” the home was purchased in 1877, “the first year . . . that the line from St. Erth to St. Ives was open” (1985, 26). In the tourism and vacation home boom of the last decades of the nineteenth century, urbanites of means began to secure summer homes on the coastal edges and islands of Great Britain, bringing tourist economies that paralleled and often augmented the decline of local industries.

10. As Gillian Beer observes, *To the Lighthouse* reflects an increasing aerial awareness of the perimeters of England and Britain as islands that are relatively small in contrast to their imagined imperial dominion and scope: “*To the Lighthouse* is Woolf’s island story. The family group and the house itself are themselves contracted intensifications of the island concept [as is] the final separation of the individual each from each” (2013, 272).

11. As Jane Goldman observes, Woolf’s postcard equates Skye with a “primal existentialism” that sounds a lot like her famous metaphor of consciousness as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us” (Woolf quoted in Goldman 2014, 13).

12. In *A Floating Commonwealth* (2008), Christopher Harvie maintains that the idea of “Great Britain” depended on a dynamic bond between the metropolitan core (and its arc of industrial, coastal cities) and its hinterlands. Central to this cohesion of diverse economies and cultures was “a Scots intellect, which refereed the dialectic between the rationality of the enlightenment and the emotional impulse toward the old order: appealing to conservatives as well as to progressives and secularists” (2008, 112). This double appeal included “a cultural recognition of Scotland which [unlike Irish cultural nationalism] balanced its political integration with England” (113).

13. As Andrew Lincoln puts it in *Walter Scott and Modernity*, Scott’s aim with regard to Highlanders and Jacobites was “to represent and contain” (2007, 2) them within an inevitable trajectory of the increasingly rational nation-state: “By representing political and social conflict within the larger context of the progress of society, Scott could undermine arguments for radical change, and encourage acquiescence in the status quo,” he writes, adding that “Scott’s progressive vision of history is always in the service of a conservative vision of moderation” (6) that was in turn key to the development of the modern British state.

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Reviews

Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination, by Vaughn Rasberry. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. 496 pages.

Rachel Farebrother

Totalitarianism has been a defining concept and issue in twentieth- and twenty-first-century political discourse, but it has rarely been analyzed with reference to either structures of racial domination in the United States or European colonialism. As Vaughn Rasberry explains in his magisterial study of race literature and the Cold War, intellectual debates about totalitarianism have tended to focus on Europe during World War II or to compare the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in a manner that precludes discussion of the racial injustice stemming from democracy's entanglement with colonialism and the slave trade. *Race and the Totalitarian Century* pushes beyond the Eurocentric focus of much scholarship on totalitarianism to present a theoretically sophisticated "revisionist account of black cultural production that demonstrates its diverse, and often unexpected, engagements with the century's pressing dilemmas wrought by world war" (15). Such an approach not only generates significant new insights by demonstrating that an array of midcentury black writers, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham, Ann Petry, and C. L. R. James, contributed to "a renewed political imagination of totalitarianism from the vantage of colonial modernity." It also prompts serious reflection about the extent to which binary Cold War logic, with its investment in a stark opposition between free and unfree spheres of the world, has left its imprint on the critical concepts that are routinely deployed in political and cultural analysis.

In this ambitious, important book, Rasberry completely transforms our understanding of both totalitarianism and midcentury black writing by bringing together two grand narratives that are usually considered in isolation: "the rise and fall of the global color line" and "the battle between the 'free world' and the totalitarian sphere" (25). The implications of this wholesale reassessment of totalitarianism, with its nuanced account of the intersecting histories and geographies of civil rights, the Cold War, World War II, and anticolonialism, are far-reaching.

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For one thing, Rasberry underscores the extent to which Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon, James, John A. Williams, and others remained suspicious of any simplistic opposition between totalitarian slavery and democratic freedom, instead drawing inspiration from the strategic ambivalences of nonalignment to create texts “that were designed to manipulate, maneuver, or assert agency within the very power blocs presumed to exercise control over subaltern actors” (2). The most significant dimension of Rasberry’s original intellectual history, however, is its overhaul of dominant conceptual frameworks for understanding the Cold War and global black literature so that the Third World is given equal weight to the “democratic and communist spheres” (111). This “geopolitical” approach opens the way for engrossing analysis of how black American writers drew upon “an imaginative and rhetorical repertoire of desegregation and decolonization” (2) to critique racial injustice at home and abroad, most notably in a fascinating chapter on the richness of commentary on the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis in the black press, a topic that has largely escaped critical discussion. Rasberry’s sophisticated deployment of international politics as an interpretive lens also generates a more nuanced picture of African American participation in the construction of a “socialist modernity in the Third World” (185), not least through examination of Du Bois’s, Graham’s, and Wright’s direct engagement (in print and in person) with intellectuals and leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Rasberry’s book falls into two parts. The first section is broadly thematic, focusing on cultural representations of black soldiers; formulations of totalitarianism in political theory and African American literature; and debates about the Suez Canal Crisis in the black public sphere. Moving with agility between the local and the global, these chapters combine far-reaching commentary on colonialism, democracy, totalitarianism, and race with illuminating close readings of film, literature, photographs, cartoons, and newspaper columns, all backed by extensive archival research. The second half deploys the multifaceted formulations of totalitarianism developed in the first three chapters as the starting point for sustained analysis of the late careers of Du Bois, Graham, and Wright. There is a particular focus on the tensions that animate their participation in a global struggle for freedom in the context of decolonization, communism, and such geopolitical events as the Suez Crisis and the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, a landmark meeting of leaders from the nonaligned nations of Africa and Asia.

Review

Part 1 begins with a probing discussion of the figure of the black soldier. Although cultural representations of black war experiences have received considerable critical attention in recent years,¹ Rasberry's analysis of visual and literary culture from World War I to the Korean War brings to light continuities and disjunctions that mark out the figure of the black soldier as a "domestically threatening, but also internationally catalytic, embodiment of racial democracy's contradictions" (37). A highlight of the chapter is Rasberry's searching analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks's cycle of war poems entitled "Gay Chaps at the Bar" (1945), which drew inspiration from letters and poems she received from black GIs at the front in her capacity as a columnist for the *Chicago Defender*. Rasberry initially appears to tread a familiar path when he explores how Brooks disrupts patriotic narratives that celebrated "the marginal but symbolically charged Negro soldier" as an embodiment of the promises of the "liberal democratic order" through "some of the most visceral representations of the black body and psyche scarred by war" (43). But his sensitivity to the global imaginative reach of "the progress," the final poem in the series, opens up interpretation beyond the domestic sphere, prompting recognition of Brooks's unease at a victory secured through mass destruction in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Indeed, the ethical motives that supposedly characterized military intervention have spawned a "wild" (46), nightmarish world order that finds its double in the veteran's war-ravaged body and mind. After World War II, Rasberry argues, the black soldier occupied a more ambivalent position: rather than embodying two fronts of resistance against totalitarianism in Europe and Jim Crow in the United States, black soldiers' participation in the occupation of Germany and Japan made them ambivalent emblems of American military might. Always alert to the ironies that abound in such representations, Rasberry supplies a masterful reading of Leonard Freed's "American Soldier" (1967), a photograph of an isolated, awkward, and far from heroic young man guarding the divide between East and West Berlin. He also records how experiences of occupation ricocheted back on the struggle for desegregation in the United States. In an interview conducted in 1959, for instance, William Gardner Smith, a journalist and novelist who was drafted into the Occupation forces, described the catalytic effect of his military service: "Do you know what it's like for a Negro to be among the 'conquerors' instead of the defeated?" he asked. "We learned about it for the first time when we 'occupied' Germany and none of us ever got over it. We'll never go back to the old way again" (57).

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In the second chapter, Rasberry sets out to restore race to conventional formulations of totalitarianism. One dimension of this broadening of terms beyond specific economic and political systems in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia involves dialogue with the writings of Third World intellectuals. To take just one striking example, the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi insisted on analogies between colonialism and totalitarianism in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957): "There is no doubt in the minds of those who have lived through it that colonialism is one variety of fascism" (quoted on 67). For Rasberry, refusal to acknowledge the contradictions of "democracy's self-mythology" when it comes to racial injustice in the colonies has its corollary in the United States, where there is a long tradition of African American writers, from Frederick Douglass to Richard Wright, issuing a vigorous challenge to the idea that totalitarianism is an aberration that could be conveniently distanced from broader American ideologies. Rasberry turns to African American literary representations of slavery and Jim Crow to "furnish evidence of a totalitarian impulse at the heart of US racial democracy" (79). Analysis of Douglass's *Narrative* (1845) and Wright's *Black Boy* (1945) as antitotalitarian narratives exposes slavery and Jim Crow as systems of surveillance and oppression that forced individuals to parrot lies about racial democracy's benevolence, an "insidiously totalitarian procedure of manufacturing 'truth'" (82).

The final chapter of part I examines black literary engagements with the Suez Canal Crisis when Egyptian leader Nasser's seizure of the canal provoked invasion by Britain, France, and Israel. Through careful reconstruction of debates about Suez in black newspapers and literary texts, Rasberry provides a compelling portrait of the complexity of midcentury black writers' interpretation of the "unfolding drama of decolonization" (135). If the Suez Crisis was the catalyst for anticolonial and antiracist critique (as in Langston Hughes's popular *Chicago Defender* column when he lampooned colonial greed by having his straight-talking character, Simple, express anger at the English because they "tried to take my canal away from me" [113]), it also prompted soul-searching among black supporters of Russian anticolonialism because the Suez Canal Crisis coincided with Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. In this context, debate about Suez provoked a much broader discussion of decolonization, communism, and racial democracy, opening the way for "a robust counter-discourse on the Suez Crisis in the black public sphere" (109). Attending to the signs and strains that animate black

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writers' multifaceted examination of these issues, Rasberry wisely notes that "the debates this crisis fomented among African Americans are more illuminating . . . than a unified narrative of protest against colonialism, and a concrete situation like Suez furnishes a complex case study in expressions of solidarity and dissension, translation and misrepresentation, propaganda and counter-propaganda" (116).

In contrast to the first half of the book, which seeks to rethink totalitarianism as a concept that has "imaginative purchase" (101) across diverse geographies, histories, and political systems, part 2, entitled "How to Build a Socialist Modernity in the Third World," comprises tightly focused case studies of Du Bois's, Graham's, and Wright's involvement in the formulation of political and cultural structures in newly independent postcolonial states. All three chapters pay close attention to the complex political positions these writers adopted in the midst of the Cold War but the investigation of Du Bois warrants careful attention. Du Bois's growing disillusionment with the capitalist imperialism of US foreign policy in the final decade of his life led him into conflict with the government over such issues as the Korean War, nuclear disarmament, communism, and the Marshall Plan before he emigrated to Nkrumah's Ghana in 1961 as a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. Few scholars have analyzed this period in depth, partly because there is such intense investment in his status as a humanist "race man."² Du Bois's critical synthesis of communism and Pan-Africanism in his late writings poses critical challenges, not least because the theory of the global color line developed in his unpublished manuscript *Russia and America* (1950) articulates enthusiastic affiliation with the Soviet Union and a tendency to excuse its failings at a time when many radicals were repelled by Stalin's growing authoritarianism. Guided by a keen awareness of the ethical complexity of the subject, Rasberry's clear-sighted commentary on aspects of the historian's career that have often been downplayed is a high point in the monograph. Taking Du Bois's sustained interest in Marxism and anticolonialism across his long career as his point of departure, Rasberry is quick to acknowledge that Du Bois strikes a "surprisingly illiberal note" (202) when suggesting that Russia's failings might be excused in pursuit of the larger goal of global emancipation, but he also notes that "the premise underlying this approach is that liberal democracies—whose targets of repression were racialized minorities or colonized subjects in remote peripheries—cannot remain exempt from the clear-eyed historical reckoning applied to Communist regimes" (210).

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Overall, Raspberry weighs the promises and perils of Du Bois's arguments with remarkable even-handedness, noting that his emancipatory project prized community, education, and institutions above the rights and responsibilities of individual citizenship.

A comparable utopian, collectivist strain emerges in Graham's ideological blending of anticolonialism, communism, and uplift in a transnational career as a journalist, writer, and activist that included spells in Nkrumah's Ghana, where she worked as the nation's first director of television, and in Nasser's Egypt. Raspberry's memorable account of Graham's ambitious preparatory work for the formulation of a media infrastructure in Ghana, a country without a regular power supply, which never came to fruition because of the overthrow of Nkrumah, provides fascinating insight into the utopianism, adaptability, and pragmatism that characterized her politics and journalism. Reading Graham's blueprint for modernization alongside the imagery of bodies and environments scarred by poverty that abounds in the lawyer and poet Pauli Murray's writings about Africa during her employment in Ghana's newly established law school only serves to bring her extraordinary ambition and adaptability into focus. Not only did she work closely with the Japanese technology firm Sanyo to acquire portable TV sets for distribution across the country, she also reimagined the Western practice of consumption of television along communitarian lines to facilitate mass education through the establishment of community centers, complete with traditional storytellers to interpret the events on screen in local languages.

The final chapter turns to Richard Wright's landmark writings on the Bandung Conference and Nkrumah's Ghana, with particular attention paid to the ambivalence and pessimism that underpins his analysis of the precarious position of newly independent nations in a world dominated by global superpowers. In formulations of nonalignment that are sharply at odds with Graham's upbeat pragmatism, Wright wrestled with the phenomenon of what he called "terror in freedom" (343), whereby independent nations were vulnerable to fascism because of a fear of occupation or colonization. In a similar vein, in an open letter to Nkrumah, he argued that militarization and coercion could be justified in the quest for economic prosperity and industrialization, a position that resonates with Mark Christian Thompson's commentary in *Black Fascisms* (2007) on the surprising susceptibility to authoritarian male leaders in 1930s black fiction, even as it betrays an enduring awareness that the potential for authoritarianism is perhaps inherent in all forms of government.

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Race and the Totalitarian Century is a dazzling, erudite addition to an impressive body of recent scholarship by Kate A. Baldwin, Mary Dudziak, Kevin Gaines, Richard Iton, Nikhil Singh, Penny Von Eschen, and Alan Wald that has transformed conceptions of midcentury African American cultural production, revealing a cultural and political sensibility that shaped and was shaped by global forces, including World War II, decolonization, and Cold War Manicheanism. What sets Rasberry's study apart is his pathbreaking reformulation of totalitarianism as a phenomenon that cannot be cordoned off into political or economic systems remote from the United States, a transformative insight that requires a recalibration of the midcentury global literary map. In the wake of Rasberry's study comes an understanding of the urgent need to attend to African American commentary on global political phenomena and Third World commentary on racial democracy, totalitarianism, and communism, perspectives that have often been crowded out in "genealogies of totalitarianism [that] cluster around a European intellectual tradition" (9). In this context, the formal patterning of Rasberry's narrative, with its layering of referents and contexts that require readers to hold multiple cultural, historical, theoretical, and political perspectives in view, is imbued with particular significance. Resisting a seamless structure that smooths over tensions or contradictions, Rasberry instead deploys a practice of juxtaposition that combines the local and the global in such a way as to reveal their ultimate entanglement. Take, for example, his interpretation of Du Bois's poem "Suez," which is enriched by productive, if occasionally jarring juxtapositions of a dizzying array of cultural and historical perspectives, from a discussion of the trope of mapping in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and analysis of the Suez Canal as an Enlightenment project to Wright's graphic description of the polluted canals in Jakarta as an image of "global capitalism gone awry in the Third World" (131) and Fanon's assiduous position of nonalignment in the face of Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian uprising. The election of Donald Trump may have prompted the appearance of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949) on bestseller lists, but Rasberry's powerful book, in its traversal of disciplinary, historical, and cultural boundaries at the micro and the macro level, offers yet another timely reminder: that our thinking on race and totalitarianism must also learn from the insights of an African American literary tradition of anti-totalitarianism, a tradition not as far from European émigrés like Arendt and the Frankfurt school as dominant interpretations would have us believe (see Kakutani 2017).

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Notes

1. For recent studies focusing on the figure of the black soldier in twentieth-century literature, film, and visual art, see Bernier 2015, James 2007, Whalan 2008, and Wald 2007.

2. Even David Levering Lewis's expansive biography, *W. E. B. Du Bois: the Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (2000) pays scant attention to the final years of Du Bois's life, when he traveled to the Soviet Union and China, joined the Communist Party, and emigrated to Ghana with Shirley Graham. One of the few studies that examines this period in depth is Bill Mullen's *W. E. B. Du Bois: Revolutionary across the Color Line* (2016).

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Lasting Impressions: The Legacies of Impressionism in Contemporary Culture,
by Jesse Matz. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 352 pages.

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There can be few movements in art to have suffered such dramatic reversals as Impressionism. Initially it shocked conservative tastes not just for the political radicalism of its focus on the seamier side of Parisian life and leisure—sexuality, prostitution, drink—where the bourgeoisie and lower classes got adulterated, but also for the way its programmatic immediacy and rapidity issued in works that to viewers accustomed to realism seemed like scandalously unfinished sketches. The movement famously got its name in 1874 when, during its first group show, the critic Louis Leroy scoffed at Monet's "Impression: Sunrise," titling his review in *Le Charivari* "The Exhibition of the Impressionists." But the group liked the term, and adopted it. When young Henry James saw their second show in Paris two years later, he was comparably unimpressed: "To embrace [these artists] you must be provided with a plentiful absence of imagination. . . . The Impressionists . . . declare that a subject which has been crudely chosen shall be loosely treated. They send detail to the dogs and concentrate themselves on general expression" ([1876] 1956, 3). To James, Impressionism's audacious provisionality seemed inimical to artistry. To Ruskin, in another defining moment of contemporary resistance to Impressionist aesthetics, it appeared a contemptuous confidence trick. Writing about Whistler's "Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket," exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, he said: "I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face" (1903–12). Whistler sued, and won the case. But the damages, notoriously set at a farthing, indicated that the judge sided with Ruskin, and the trial bankrupted Whistler.

As waves of new, modernist movements broke in the early twentieth century—Fauvisme, Cubism, Die Brücke, Futurism, Vorticism—Impressionism was no longer avant-garde. By 1910, when Roger Fry curated the first post-Impressionist exhibition in London, Impressionism was something in relation to which you were supposed to be post-. Of course Impressionism didn't just cease. One of the many virtues of Jesse Matz's earlier book, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (2001), is

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its demonstration of Impressionism as an influence persisting through the modernism of writers such as Proust, the later James, Conrad, Ford, and Woolf.

The avant-garde view that Impressionism had swiveled round from being a revolutionary provocation to a tedious convention reflected the converse volte-face in public taste. As Impressionism was acquired by museums and collectors, it became the standard of modern beauty, and so it has remained in the art world, or at least in the world of blockbuster exhibitions, museum merchandising, and art for investment. Impressionism continues to draw the biggest crowds, generate the most mechanical reproductions, and achieve the highest auction prices.

It is this curious persistence of Impressionism—despite post-Impressionism, despite abstraction, despite conceptualism, despite postmodernism—that provides Matz with the central subject of his brilliant new book, *Lasting Impressions*. What does its persistence tell us about Impressionism? And what does it tell us about ourselves, and our subsequent aesthetics? Matz begins, engagingly, with a confessional reminiscence. He is fifteen. The two still lifes that hung in his childhood home, and which he had barely attended to, are described by a sophisticated friend as examples of “pseudo-impressionism,” and he sees them differently: as examples of “false artistry” and “fake luxury” (1). The rest of the book traces how these subthemes—of kitsch, on the one hand, and trickery, on the other—appear inseparable from the legacies of Impressionism. Researching the painter of those still lifes, the Hungarian émigré Béla Kontuly, Matz is surprised to find that he had been a modernist before the Second World War. For a Western modernist, a turn to Impressionism in the 1960s would seem a regression, an anachronism, a turning of his back on Abstract Expressionism, yet Matz argues that it could equally be read as an escape from an enforced Socialist Realism, a declaration of the freedom of individual perceptions and styles.

This could be the introduction to a very fine book focused solely on the legacies of Impressionism in painting and—given Matz’s earlier book—in literature too. These certainly provide two central lines through *Lasting Impressions*, as we shall see. But the most striking thing about the book is how much more it offers. It also takes in music, advertising, cinema, tricksters, the art market, the mass marketing of reproductions, and, in a surprising but dazzling conclusion, books popularizing cognitive science and books about autism. Taken together, the case these explorations assemble so cogently is that notions of the “impression” remain central not only to our aesthetics but also to our philosophy of mind, our economy, and our

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social and political life. "Impressionism," says Matz, "is everywhere" (18).

The opening chapter explores "Histories for the Tache": the signature Impressionist touch, spot, or brushstroke, and the "dual nature" it has repeatedly been understood as displaying—both the guarantee of the phenomenological reality of the rendered perception and a sign of the paintedness of the surface, the facticity of the artwork. If the technique "could simulate something real, it also expressed the artist's individual personality" (37). In the second chapter, "The Impressionist Advertisement," Matz explores another side of this technique. He begins with a hostile review from 1874, in which Jules-Antoine Castagnary argued that Cézanne offers a lurid warning revealing what happens to those who "pursue the impression to excess": "Starting with idealization, they will arrive at that degree of unbridled romanticism where nature is merely a pretext for dreams and where the imagination becomes powerless to formulate anything but personal, subjective fantasies without any echo in general reason, because they are without control and without possible verification in reality" (quoted in Matz, 72). Matz argues that, according to this view, Impressionism ushers in the "shallow culture of meaningless sensation" (73) that Baudrillard was to deplore a century later: "It led, in other words, to advertising," and "the main problem with advertising is its impressionism." That is characteristically shrewd, though it needs setting against a far worse problem: that advertising, far from representing fantasy without control, attempts precisely to control our fantasies so as to achieve unconscious manipulation of our desires for commercial ends. In case studies of particular advertisements, though, Matz discovers a more nuanced dialectic. Those ads drawing on the avant-garde potential of inchoate perceptions have proved problematic, introducing a gap between image and text. In those drawing on the familiarity of Impressionism, then—Matz's example here is the 1992 Levi's campaign of "The Swimmer," based on John Cheever's story about a man pool-hopping his way home through the suburbs (but with Cézanne's bathers also in the background)—what from one point of view is a kitsch banalization of a serious critique is in fact "a spur to serious pleasure and valid judgement . . . an ongoing project of perpetual aesthetic emergence" (98). This duality becomes the dominant theme of the second half of the book: it is precisely those productions likeliest to invite denigration as kitsch or con that prove sites of the most interesting "aesthetic emergence," forging new forms and styles out of Impressionism's bargain debasement.

The third chapter, on French cinema, analyzes the influential notion of *photogénie*: a problematic term intended to convey the essence of

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cinema as art. Skillfully unpacking its ambiguities, Matz concludes that, ultimately, “photogénie is a fetishized version of the impression” (113); in other words, that while early theorists of cinema thought they were trying to analyze the new medium, they were also still working through the contradictions of Impressionism: its dual power to evoke reality and the phantasmatic. *Lasting Impressions* then takes a global turn, moving away from America and Europe to consider “The Image of Africa.” Matz gives an excellent analysis of Chinua Achebe’s rejection of Conrad’s work as racist, relating it to colonial literary education and to Achebe’s own fictional aesthetic; Africa, according to Achebe, is reduced in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) “to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind” (quoted in Matz, 133). To whatever degree one thinks Conrad is implying a critique of imperialism, “it is the height of corrupt imperialist fraud, this relocation of large-scale cultural trauma to the tragic ‘consciousness’ of those actually responsible for it” (133). What was required—and what Achebe’s own fiction provides—is a realism adequate to “Africa’s social context” (136). *Things Fall Apart* (1959) is “directly antithetical to Conrad’s impressionism because it reflects the power of African social life to overdetermine subjective reality rather than its incapacity to shape it.” The implication that Africa has a single “social context” might give us pause, especially in an argument about an imperialist reduction of the Congo to a crisis in Kurtz’s or Marlow’s subjectivity. In fact, this chapter attends with nuance to writers from, or writing about, several different countries—Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—and to how the problem was just as much the educational system, which, however well-intentioned as a preparation for independence, nonetheless imposed the British canon.

Matz then goes on to offer what seems like a counter-argument, central to his book, about realist writers following Achebe: “This antithetical tragic realism, however, retains a Conradian sense of the problem of the subjective impression. Conrad’s way of writing the image of Africa provoked a postimpressionist realism designed to make the impression’s duality more reliably one of self and world, Achebe’s work, and then the ‘School of Achebe’ that his realism inspired, developed a postimpressionist mode in which perceptions could emerge into political consciousness” (136). This is the characteristic turn that *Lasting Impressions* traces across the long twentieth century and its various media: the rejection of Impressionism entails a return to and rethinking of the impression, allowing new aesthetic configurations to emerge.

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Chapters 5 and 6 explore two grounds on which Impressionism has been rejected. “The Impressionist Fraud” juxtaposes three very different cases of figures attacked as tricksters: aesthetic showman Yves Klein, whose blue “monochromes” sought to engage with perceptual process in Impressionist ways, and James Frey, whose memoir of recovery from alcoholism, *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), endorsed by Oprah Winfrey, notoriously proved to be a work of fiction. In between these two, Matz discusses Ryoei Saito, the Japanese entrepreneur whose legendarily high bids for Impressionist works at auctions contributed to what was perceived as “the Japanese impressionism bubble” (185), and who was subsequently exposed as a financial fraudster with little care for art (he joked he would have Van Gogh’s portrait of Dr. Gachet cremated with him). If Impressionism from the start conjured anxieties about its sleight of hand, and associated commercial trickery (remember Ruskin contra Whistler), Matz sees these later tricksters as showing it as emerging into new forms of playfulness.

Art fraud implies a conscious desire to hoodwink someone about the originality or value of an artwork. In chapter 6, on contemporary art, Matz attends to a case where belated Impressionism is berated as a form of kitsch—a species of unconscious fraud, in which the derivative work pandering to popular sentimentality passes itself off as original and worthwhile. Thomas Kinkade, as Matz puts it, “made his name at the shopping mall, peddling the imagery of nostalgia”: a world of folksy rural beauty, illuminated with a supernatural glow. Many malls have outlets for reproductions of his work, which, bizarrely, customers can pay to have customized with some touches added by the hand of a store employee. This seems the clearest-cut case imaginable of a debased and commercialized pseudo-impressionism. Matz contrasts Kinkade with a very different artist who nonetheless also evokes Impressionism’s visual style: Peter Doig, whose work doesn’t aspire to an Impressionist look but draws on its textures and motifs to produce work that is at once beautiful, referential, and innovative.

Then, in another breathtakingly antithetical move, Matz writes that “Kinkade is not therefore a hopeless case. If his pseudo-impressionism is kitsch because it fails to make his kitsch aesthetic a subordinate part of a postconceptual art project, perhaps it only takes a postconceptual project to redeem his pseudo-impressionism—to make it too a proper form of art” (222). This is more than an elegant speculative antithesis. He describes just such a project, “staged by Jeffrey Vallance, an installation artist associated with the ‘infiltration’ art movement,” who became

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“the first (and still only) curator to mount a show of Kinkade’s work”: *Thomas Kinkade: Heaven on Earth* (2004), at California State University, Fullerton. The show presented Kinkade’s oeuvre, and his world, as an art installation, thus foregrounding the very question kitsch discourages, of how to look at and understand the work of art. Vallance advocates a strategy of “dissonance arousal,” whereby the “cognitive dissonance” (quoted in Matz, 223) of such an experience—of being encouraged to look critically at kitsch in a museum setting—results in an effect of transcendence. People came expecting to hate the work but enjoyed the exhibition (Oh no, it’s kitsch! Wait, look, it’s meta-kitsch!). It is a further example of belated impressionism finding itself at the contemporary cutting edge.

Chapter 7 on “The Pseudo-Impressionist Novel,” draws on David James’s work on the afterlife of Impressionism in contemporary fiction to juxtapose three novels with especially close relationships to Impressionist precursors: W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001), with its knowing reference to Proustian involuntary memory, and two novels that make impressionist authors central characters: Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* (1998) and Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* (2004). Here Matz’s argumentative strategy comes home with full and disconcerting force. Each book is initially critiqued as succumbing to pseudo-Impressionist kitsch. The fact that the involuntary memories triggered in *Austerlitz* are of the Holocaust debases both the experience of the victims and the methods of impressionism. That Tóibín’s Henry James evades articulating his homoerotic desire even to himself seems to Matz a failure of impressionism to register the disturbances of mental life. Similarly, Cunningham’s aestheticization of Woolf’s suicide and modernization of the story of Mrs. Dalloway are seen as lacking the very qualities that make Woolf’s writing so existentially challenging.

Then Matz crafts some cognitive dissonance of his own. Such Holocaust memories as are triggered in *Austerlitz* are enigmatic, uncanny traces of experiences not his in the first place. Rather than failures of impressionism, they are failed impressions put to ingenious, evocative, postimpressionist, and postmodern uses. When Cunningham returns to Woolf herself in the third section of *The Hours*, Matz identifies “the uneven, uneasy style of thought and feeling we actually do find in Mrs. Dalloway” (243). But pondering Cunningham’s selective mimicry of true Woolfian impressionism produces another moment of cognitive dissonance. Is he using impressionism merely as occasional decorative ornamentation? Or is he reflexively placing it alongside other fictional modes, to assemble a metafictional impressionism? Analyzing the passage in *The Master* in

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which James shares a bed naked with Oliver Wendell Holmes, Matz finds a vital impressionism that both expresses James's homoerotic curiosity and his failure to act on it: in James's mind, as Tóibín imagines it, thought of sexuality is vague not simply because James is repressed but because there is no sexuality without the language for it. That problem—at once so Jamesian and so contemporary—is what makes Tóibín's version of the Jamesian impression such a timely reinvention (249).

A second kind of critique thus appears alongside the imputation of kitsch: a critique that can condemn pseudo-impressionism for its uneven handling. Again, however, that critique can flip over into its antithesis: unevenness as a sign of technical and theoretical agility, a post-postmodern reflexivity to set alongside Doig's and Vallance's postconceptual reinvestigation of impressionism and its relation to kitsch. This rhetorical zigzagging might induce motion sickness rather than transcendence. But the final chapter, "Thinking Medium," makes clear what is at stake. Matz brings out the way that books popularizing expertise about rationality and decision-making, such as Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, or Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, adopt "an impressionist outlook when the mind's mysteries are a matter of impressionistic intuition" (256). He takes their attention to ephemeral, fluid perception before it is subjected to rational interpretation to indicate how important the concept of the impression remains in contemporary culture, and how it has been co-opted by self-help books and corporate training. The intricacies, subtleties, and stylishness of Matz's argument are impossible to capture in summary. But he effects a superb deconstruction of what he calls, in the subtitle of the final chapter, "The Rhetoric of Popular Cognition," showing that just as Kahneman's model of binary systems of fast and slow thought processes is undermined by his advocacy of a middle way, so Gladwell's invocation of the notion of expertise threatens his advocacy of "thinking without thinking." What Matz doesn't quite say, though his juxtaposition implies it, is that the two books are themselves already antithetical: Kahneman offering to teach us to trust our impressions less (especially when statistics are concerned), Gladwell offering to teach us how to trust them more.

This literature is contrasted with another that may appear incommensurate: autism memoirs, such as Temple Grandin's *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life* (1996) and Tito Mukhopadhyay's *How Can I Talk If My Lips Don't Move?* (2008). The rationale is a shift in the theory of autism from the view that "people with autism were locked in their own minds and unable to understand the minds of

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others" (263), their symptoms "all a matter of nonimpressionability," to an antithetical view that "it is hypersensitivity that produces the autistic classic non-communicative detachment," a hypersensitivity, that is, to impressions. According to this view, "the sensitive mind is unable to integrate sensory input," which allies the autistic with the impressionist—and produces that "cognitive dissonance" that has come to seem inseparable from Impressionism's reception. In a final tour de force, Matz argues that whereas Kahneman's and Gladwell's business books dissect impressionist consciousness, Grandin and Mukhopadhyay fully inhabit it, achieving a formal integrity that does justice to the cognitive diversity they experience and that escapes popular cognition's version of contemporary impressionism. And here we realize that Matz's own radically ambiguous perspectives are a quest for a mode of argumentation that can remain open to Impressionism's foundational shaking of foundations.

Lasting Impressions was published before a business guru, trickster, and fraud became president of the United States, and before "fake news" became news. There is, however, one key twenty-first century phenomenon it doesn't take on but which arguably represents the most significant locus of new forms of contemporary impressionism: the digital world. The flooding of perception with ever-changing and enhanced visuality on sites such as Instagram; the impression of immediacy, fluidity, and reportage on the real in social network sites; the ephemerality of Snapchat; the tache effect of the tweet; the immersivity of virtual reality—all these examples might lead us to think that the "i" in "iPhone" could as well stand for impressionism.

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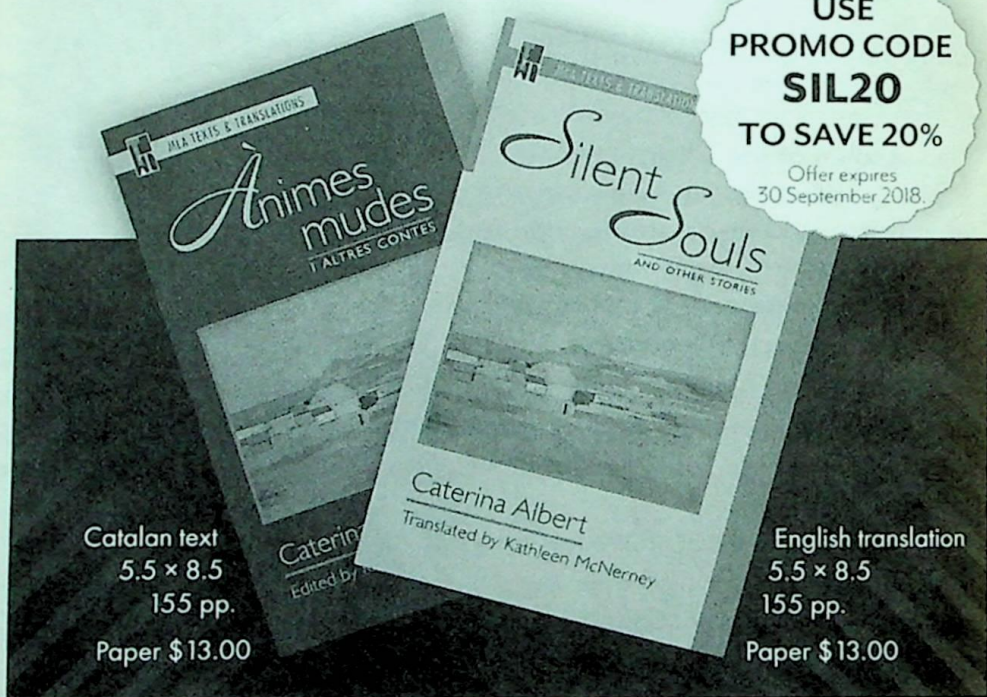
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